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PETRONEL.

A Novel.

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT,

(MRS. ROSS CHURCH.)

AUTHOR OF "LOVE'S CONFLICT," "VERONIQUE," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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visitors during the Rockborough season ; and Lower Rockborough, which contains the arsenal and dockyard, and is frequented by no more worshipful company than that of officials and salesmen, with a sprinkling of tipsy sailors and their associates.

As may readily be believed, there has never been any lack of doctors in Rockborough ; but at the time my story opens, some ten or more years ago, although it contained many well-known and valued practitioners, there was but one amongst them all who was universally acknowledged to have borne away the palm of indiscriminate popularity, for whose attendance, rich and poor, visitors and residents alike clamoured ; and for which, in consequence, many were obliged to go without,—and that one was Dr. Ulick Ford.

His house, standing in the most central position of the town, was so well known,

as scarcely to require the small brass plate which bore his name upon the door ; the iron clapper of his bell knew little rest day or night, and his dark-coloured brougham, with its noiseless wheels and thorough-bred horses, might be seen at all hours swiftly rolling from street to street, or standing patiently before the hall-doors of his numerous patients. And there were three very remarkable circumstances connected with the popularity of Dr. Ford. In the first place it had arisen neither from a handsome face nor a seductive manner ; in the second, his medical brethren joined as heartily in his praises as did his patients ; and in the third, it had not spoiled him.

There are as many varieties of the human species in the medical as in any other profession ; and the generality of them are known to most of us. We have all met

the blandly-spoken, oily-tongued doctor, who scarcely raises his voice above a whisper, and gives our hand the slightest suspicion of a sympathetic squeeze as he wishes us good-bye, who worms out our symptoms from us, and sometimes even the opinion of others on our case, before he ventures to go home, and look out the proper prescription for its relief. And who has not been subjected to the ordeal of being catechised by the brusque doctor, who calls a spade a spade, and talks so loud that the whole house can hear him, who pooh-poohs any suggestion of the patient, however modestly advanced, and asking for writing materials, sits down at your desk, abuses the ink, grumbles at the paper, and finally takes his departure, leaving a scrawl behind him which has utterly disabled your best pen for future use. But the scrawl cures your complaint, for

the brusque doctor, whose friends call him a rough diamond, is clever, though intensely disagreeable. Then there is the talkative doctor, generally a little one with a big head, who jerks into your room like a split pea, and is always exceedingly cheerful to counteract your dullness ; who tells everybody they will be all right in a day or two, and brings with him such a mass of gossip about other people's concerns, that he runs off again before he has remembered to ask if there has been any change in your condition since he saw you last, compelling you to send a message after him before the day is done. And last, though not least, there is the young unpractised hand, who is not quite sure of himself, and anything but sure of you ; but who goes at physicking, hacking and hewing, with a wild recklessness which makes you shudderingly remember that perfection can be reached only

through repeated failure, and that the few must be sacrificed to save the many.

A noble sentiment, as everybody must allow, only one can appreciate it so much better when not in the minority.

But Ulick Ford was none of these ; he neither soothed his patients by flattery, nor frightened them by bawling ; he carried no interesting gossip from house to house to please the ladies, nor had he large black eyes nor glossy whiskers wherewith to captivate them ; whence then arose his enormous popularity—more, his power ? For no one ever thought of disregarding a command which he had left behind him. Refractory patients, who usually put all pills behind the fire, and draughts out of the window, swallowed Dr. Ford's prescriptions religiously, if not without a murmur ; nurses, who were apt to enlarge on their experience in the absence of the medical

man, and much loved to have their own way in opposition to his, knew it would be as much as their places were worth to differ in the smallest respect from the line of action Dr. Ford laid down for them ; and children who bent the spoons, and bit pieces out of the wineglasses when their rightful owners attempted to administer medicine to them, meekly opened their little mouths under the fascination of Ulick Ford's quiet eyes, and said, "Thank you, Dr. Ford," when the obnoxious potion had disappeared.

It was his powerful and unerring intellect, the majesty of which thus made itself felt from basement to attic, and proclaimed him master wherever he appeared.

Men, women, and children recognised it by instinct ; his professional contemporaries were too proud of him to be envious, and it may safely be said that no one thought so

little of his talent, spoke so little of it, and cared so little for it, as himself.

Yet his success had been rapid enough and complete enough to have turned the heads of most men, particularly men of so ambitious a mind as Dr. Ford possessed. Ten years before he had been almost unknown in Rockborough, and quite unknown to fame : now his name was on the list of surgeons attached to every hospital and infirmary in the town, and he himself constantly summoned far beyond its precincts for the purpose of consultation or advice. *Then* he had imagined that to arrive at the top of the ladder was to grasp the utmost good that life held for him ; *now* he stood on the last rung, ready to confess that all things were vanity. He was uniformly calm, collected, and benevolent ; but he was also uniformly indifferent. There was a secret in the life of Dr. Ford, which few

had mastered beside himself. In affirming that, ten years before, he had been almost unknown in Rockborough, I speak of him in a professional point of view. Under no circumstances could he personally have been considered a stranger there, for his connections were irreproachable, and Sir Lionel Halsted, his uncle by the mother's side, had occupied his hereditary estate of Frampton, situated a few miles distant from the town, for more than a quarter of a century. Not that the Halsteds, male and female, were particularly proud of their cousin "the doctor;" on the contrary, when his widowed mother, who was considered by her own people to have made a shocking *mésalliance* by marrying the late Mr. Ford, had first made arrangements for Ulick to pursue his practice in Rockborough (hoping thereby to procure for him the influential countenance of her brother), Sir Lionel,

who was a purse-proud and arrogant man, had taken the act more as an insult than a compliment. His sister had sufficiently disgraced them by marrying a nobody, so he argued ; why should she aggravate the offence by settling her son down in practice under their very noses ?

However, he could scarcely refuse to receive his nephew at Frampton, where, with his mother and sister, he had been a frequent, if not a very welcome guest, until he had the misfortune to fall in love with his youngest cousin, Cecilia Halsted, and, what was worse, to permit the young lady to become captivated in her turn.

Ulick Ford had been a young, fresh, and inexperienced fellow in those days ; well-looking, if not handsome, and with an amount of manliness beyond his years ; and Cecilia Halsted had appeared to him all that was loveliest and most loveable in

woman. He was not rich, but he had a moderate income, with the prospect of steady increase, and he was willing to wait ; and foolish enough to suppose that youth and health and love and patience were qualities worth anything as barter in the matrimonial market. He came forward, therefore, openly and honourably to Sir Lionel with these pleas upon his lips, and Sir Lionel was furious at the very idea.

Asked to give Cissy, his youngest, prettiest, most favoured daughter, whom he designed for nothing under a title, in marriage to her cousin, a man of no name or family or pretension, who had but just started in his profession, and possessed no particular interest wherewith to effect a rise ! It was incredible. Sir Lionel was at first perfectly unable to comprehend the presumption of his nephew ; and when he

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Fleming. Everybody talked a great deal of the effect which this calamity had upon the family at Frampton—of how Sir Lionel on hearing the news had lifted his hand to heaven and solemnly sworn never again to meet either his daughter or her husband—of how the mother had declared that she would far rather have been called upon to deck out poor faulty Cissy for her burial—and the brothers and sisters been enjoined never to mention the name of Fleming in their parents' ears.

It was doubtless a great shock to them all, and a great blow to their parental pride ; and the world of their acquaintance made the most of it : but no one thought of Ulick Ford, or how he bore the downfall of his hopes, and no one could have answered (even his mother or his sister) if they had cared to put the question.

He had not made his disappointment a

reason for leaving Rockborough ; but, strong in the knowledge of his own powers of endurance, had settled down quietly to his work, and steadily progressed with it. Always grave and thoughtful beyond his years, his mother and sister had perceived no great difference in his demeanour, even after the news of his cousin's elopement had reached him, excepting, perhaps, that the circumstance urged him in self-defence to increased study, and forced the blossoms of renown which he was already commencing to put forth, into fruition, a few years earlier than would otherwise have happened. For, generally speaking, it is not the young and happy who can apply themselves to work ; their thoughts, like butterflies, glancing amongst flowers, have too many distractions to favour steady application : but when we have aged, prematurely, perhaps, but none the less surely,

.

when life's heaven has assumed neutral tints, and all is barren from Dan to Beersheba, it is a relief, mentally, to leave oneself behind, and enter the lists of labour where Fame stands ready to reward the victor.

Perhaps Ulick Ford, with Cissy Halsted by his side, and the house filled with children, might have become as famous as he was now, but the probabilities are that he would not. Home ties may be a great incentive to work, but they are also a great distraction ; and a man finds less time for thought, and less opportunity for business, when a dozen little hands are pulling at his coat-tails, and half as many dulcet voices entreating father to pay them some attention. Any way Ulick Ford had put no such temptations in his path, and had prospered in his profession ;

how his heart had prospered was best known to himself.

It was now fourteen years since these events had happened, and he was a man of six-and-thirty ; his mother had died some time before, and he lived with his sister Marcia, who was very unlike him both in appearance and disposition, but the only near relation that he possessed. It must not be supposed that all these years he had never renewed his connection with the family at Frampton. Sir Lionel Halsted had little thought what an indomitable spirit of pride and ambition lay concealed in the breast of the young man whom he had so summarily dismissed from his house. A pride which determined Ulick Ford never to set foot in Frampton again until he was sent for, and an ambition which promised that the day would come when he should be so summoned, and make the

family proud to acknowledge their connection with him ; a prophecy which Time fulfilled.

After the elopement of poor Cissy, and the marriage of his second daughter Julia to Lord Otho Vivian, an union after her father's own heart, Sir Lionel had thrown out several hints to his nephew (then looked upon as a fast rising man) that he should be pleased to see him again within the walls of Frampton ; but Ulick Ford had obstinately refused to take them, and never met his kinsman except in his own house, until one day, when Sir Lionel's gout had flown to his stomach, and all Frampton was in an uproar ; and a hasty note, in his aunt's handwriting, had implored him to come to them, and try what he could do in aiding the other medical men to save his uncle's life. And he had gone, and Sir Lionel had recovered, and

chose to attribute his recovery to his nephew's timely assistance ; and an open and permanent truce had thereupon been signed between Frampton and Rockborough.

Since which time the Halsted family had paid him the compliment of never employing any other medical man ; but, as the compliment was the only thing they ever did pay him, some people might have considered it rather a flimsy one.

Yet Ulick Ford did not grumble, but perseveringly physicked them, gratis, all round ; even being called upon to extend his attentions to the interesting young family of Lady Otho Vivian, who generally spent the winter months in Rockborough, whilst her husband passed away his time in the company of *coryphées* and operatic singers in Paris.

But if his high-born relations ignored the subject of Christmas bills, Dr. Ford

was, at all events, included amongst the guests at most of the state dinners given at Frampton, and from which he was generally called away before he had had time to settle himself to the first course. So that altogether he had attained to a very comfortable and friendly footing with his family, which must have quite compensated him for being expected to drive miles to attend any one of them who chanced to get a cold in the head, and to permit virtue to be its own reward. Besides, as the Halsteds knew and often said to one another, Ulick Ford had lots of money and could afford it.

That he had "lots of money" there was no doubt, but he seemed as indifferent about that as about every other earthly thing, and gave it away as quickly as he made it. Not in public charities—if Dr. Ford subscribed to such things, it was done

privately, for his name never appeared upon the lists—but freely, broad-cast, sowing comfort as he went, and refusing to acknowledge his generosity, far less to reap thanks in return. For his was a strange character to any one who tried to dip below the surface, and it was difficult to say what he liked or did not like, or believed or did not believe. His nearest friends confessed he was a puzzle past their finding out : and as for his sister, she had long since given up attempting even to trace the clue to most of his conduct. He was a sealed book, of which it seemed as though the key were lost ; but those who thought so, saw his actions without being able to see the reason of them.

Let his historian, who holds the time-honoured privilege of revealing feelings as well as facts, try if by showing all sides of his character, the riddle may not be solved.

CHAPTER II.

DR. FORD AMONGST HIS PATIENTS.

IT was night in Rockborough—a dark, boisterous night in March, with the rain descending in torrents, and a cold wind blowing straight from the sea, which drove the shower slant-wise, and caused it to dash against people's faces, and up their petticoats, making umbrellas useless, and waterproofs a mere name.

But inside the crimson-curtained dining-room of Dr. Ford's house, where he and his friend Bertram were talking together over their wine, all looked warm and comfortable enough. It was not a large room, indeed the whole house was of moderate

size, for Ulick Ford contended that to keep up a mansion without a family to inhabit it was to convert luxury into desolation, but it was exquisitely furnished, and did not contain an article, whether for use or ornament, that was not plain, solid, and of the very best.

It was the fashion in Rockborough to say that Dr. Ford wasted incredible sums of money upon the adornment of his residence; and so far the supposition was correct that if at any time he set his heart upon obtaining a certain article, whether of ebony, bronze, or porcelain, he would have it, cost what it might; but that was due, less to his love of luxury than to his love of power which refused to be worsted even in so ignoble an encounter as a passage of arms with a broker. But how much real value he set on the *objets d'art* thus obtained may be imagined from the

fact that it was only necessary for anyone whom he liked to admire his purchase to find it speedily transferred to his own possession. At the same time, that Dr. Ford had a keen eye for the beautiful and artistic was plainly evidenced by the articles retained for his own use.

He was leaning with his back against the mantel-piece as we see him now, and, without the slightest pretensions to being called handsome, was a man whom few strangers would look at without observing. I wonder how many really handsome men—that is men with beauty of feature as well as expression—have inspired love, love *pur et simple*, in the hearts of women. The evidences of power and strength and intellect in a man's face are almost incompatible with beauty; and what a woman most admires in the other sex are the qualities which are not her own.

Soft languishing eyes, and pretty features and delicate hands and feet, form her weapons of war, and no man should entrench upon his mistress's privileges. We know that Adonis and Antinous had their admirers, but I fancy Mars and Jupiter inspired the more lasting passions ; and there was hidden truth in the confession I once heard fall from a woman's lips, that she loved her lover because she knew he could "crush her with his little finger, if he chose !"

If he chose ! and he did not choose—there lay the charm ! And though modern lovers, at all events in the upper walks of civilization, are not in the habit of showing off their muscular ability by crushing their mistresses, that they could do so, and refrain, will always raise them in a woman's eyes. She was made for subjection, and however much in these days she may fight

against the conviction, she knows that where she loves a man she loves to feel herself in his power, mentally and physically, and that without even the means of resistance. That he should spare her, spare her ignorance, her folly or her weakness, adds only to her admiration of him : but she would rather, mentally, be crushed than see no power in the man to crush her. Ulick Ford, at all events, would give no woman reason to complain, either of his excess of beauty or his lack of strength. He had an easy figure—large and vigorous, with the bones well-covered, as one sees in healthy men who have attained his age : and he was fashionably dressed without bearing the least appearance of a dandy.

He had a broad, open brow, which was oftener seen wrinkled with thought than smooth and careless ; his nose and chin were heavy, his mouth expressed a great

amount of determination, (some people said obstinacy, but they were those who had never seen it relax to meet the proffered kiss of a little child;) and his face altogether might have been called stern, had it not been for his eyes, which, though deepset and penetrating, were remarkably mild, almost pensive in their gaze. *Du reste*, my hero was dark, wore little hair about his face, and had a serious and dignified comportment which inspired with confidence all those who had anything to do with him.

The friend with whom he was conversing, was a great contrast to him in every respect. William Bertram had originally been intended for a doctor, and entered college at the same time as Ulick Ford, but want of nerve, and an ultra fastidiousness, which he appeared unable to overcome, had disqualified him for the medical

profession, and he had relinquished it to enter the church. He was a tall man, of much the same age as his friend, but slight as a reed ; with dark hair and eyes, which had too much of the " old man " still left in their twinkle, and an open, laughter-loving mouth. He was now the rector of Oxley, a small village, fifteen or twenty miles to the north of Rockborough ; but he had never given up his college intimacy with Ulick Ford, and often came over by train, generally unexpectedly, but always welcome, to spend a few hours in the company of his old chum for whom he entertained an affection which was almost brotherly. He had appeared in his usual manner, without giving any notice of his intentions, that afternoon ; and dinner being completed, Miss Ford had left the gentlemen to the enjoyment of their wine.

" Ford ! why on earth don't you marry ?"

exclaimed William Bertram abruptly, as he contemplated the figure of his friend.

He must have known him very well to have fearlessly put so close a question to him, for his Rockborough intimates would as soon have thought of cutting their own throats as approaching any subject of so private a nature with Dr. Ford.

Ulick Ford raised the glass of sherry, which he held in his hand, to the light, and contemplated it for an instant before replying; perhaps it was done to hide the fact that his cheek had flushed beneath the pointed inquiry.

“ Might I not put the same question to yourself ? ” he said presently.

“ Certainly—and I am ready to answer it. I should marry to-morrow if I had the means, but I fancy most of the young ladies of the present day would pull a very long face if I asked them to come and

sit down with me for the rest of their lives, in the rectory at Oxley."

"It is a very comfortable house, is it not?"

"Well enough for a bachelor, but four hundred a year is not much to maintain a family on, and I have no prospect of increase. Besides, I have not your opportunities; you must see dozens of nice girls in Rockborough."

"Indeed, I scarcely ever see one; I have no time to waste on what Rockborough calls society."

"But amongst your patients."

Dr. Ford looked gravely amused.

"Medical men are not in the habit of falling in love with their patients, Bertram: in the first place it is not considered *du r gle*, and in the second, they know a little too much about them."

"But you really should have a wife, Ford."

“And why? In what particular should I gain by having a wife? my sister manages my house to my entire satisfaction.”

“Ah, yes! of course; but still, that’s not like having a mistress at the head of your table.”

“Infinitely better in my opinion,” laughed the doctor. “Marcia never interests herself in my affairs, but is always ready to do my bidding; whereas a wife, in all probability, would first try to worm out my secrets from me, and then bemoan herself because she was neglected in order that they might be attended to. A professional man who spends half his time from home, has no business with a wife and family, Bertram.”

“The world doesn’t think so,” rejoined his friend. “You know the strong prejudice that always exists against a bachelor

doctor ; and, indeed, Ford, I think it but right to tell you, that I have heard from more than one quarter lately, that were you to marry, your practice would be materially increased."

"Thank you for nothing, my dear fellow ! My practice is more now than I can manage properly : and Austin has already warned me that if it continues, we must have extra help next season. Would you burthen me further ?"

"But for the look of the thing," urged Bertram, "it is always so much more respectable for a man to have a wife of his own, instead—"

"Instead of the wives of other men," returned Ulick Ford with a curious half cynical smile. "Granted, I quite agree with you there, only you see, Bertram, I have no intention of taking either the one or the other."

At this juncture, the doctor's man brought two or three notes in upon a salver, and whispered some communication in his master's ear, and at the same time Miss Ford peeped in at the door.

"Are you ready for coffee, Ulick?"

"Yes! certainly, and let us have it directly, Marcia. I have business which takes me out at once."

Miss Ford drew a long face, and advanced further into the room.

"Surely not to-night; the wind and rain are something fearful."

"It is of no consequence, I must go. Bertram, I need not apologise for leaving you so abruptly, you know the necessity of the occasion. I hope to be back in the course of an hour, and finish our argument."

"All right—I shall not leave before nine."

“And meanwhile Marcia must remain here, and entertain you with a dish of Rockborough gossip. Wheeler, my coat !” For by this time Dr. Ford had hastily tossed off the scalding cup of coffee presented to him, and was ready for departure.

“Why, Ulick, you are surely not going to walk in this weather,” remonstrated his sister, “and with the influenza so prevalent as it is. Why can’t you send Mr. Austin?”

Dr. Ford answered her never a word ; but enveloped himself in a waterproof coat which made him look enormous, and took his hat and stick in his hand.

“Or take the carriage,” continued Miss Marcia, in a plaintive tone of voice.

“What ! and keep my horses standing in this rain ?” he replied, with elevated eyebrows. “That is very likely. Good-bye to both of you for the present ; I shall not be

much over the hour, after which Austin may take the remainder of the work for this evening ;” and with a word or two of direction to his servant, he was gone.

“ As fond of work and his own way as ever !” exclaimed William Bertram, as the hall-door slammed, and Miss Ford drew a seat to the fire. “ I have been trying hard to persuade your brother to take a wife, Miss Ford, but I am afraid he will prove obdurate.”

Miss Ford opened her beady black eyes in sheer astonishment. She was a great contrast to the doctor in every respect, and no stranger would have guessed the close relationship between them. She was an angular ferret-faced woman, with very sharp sight, and on occasions an equally sharp tongue, with something of her brother’s decision of character, without any of his sense to prevent its degeneration : a first-rate

woman to look after servants, to spy out cobwebs and keep down the weekly bills ; but a very unsatisfactory sort of woman to take to one's bosom with the intention of keeping the fire at one's heart alight.

She was proud of Dr. Ford, whose senior she happened to be by a couple of years ; but she was considerably afraid of him : and her surprise at Mr. Bertram's audacity was to the full as great as her disinclination to hear that such a topic as marriage had been thrust beneath the notice of her brother. For to see a wife beneath the roof where she had ruled so long, was the last thing in this world Miss Ford desired, and an event which she had ceased to fear now for many years past.

" Why do you look so astonished ?" said William Bertram, as he watched the effect of his communication. " Is there anything so extraordinary in the idea

that my friend Ford should some day get married?"

"What did Ulick say to it?" was her sole reply.

"Oh—he!—he said all the women might be hanged for aught he cared: well, not exactly that," seeing the lady's increased surprise: "but he certainly did not seem to take the same view of the case that I do. Now, what do you suppose can be the reason of it, Miss Ford?" he continued, as he stretched out his feet to the fire and assumed a contemplative mood; "is he still hankering after that old affair, think you?"

"What old affair?" she demanded.

"Why, his engagement to his cousin Miss Halsted."

"His engagement to Cissy Halsted? Ulick still hankering after Cissy Halsted—Mrs. Fleming, as I should say now! Why, Mr. Bertram, you must be crazy to think

of such a thing ; it's nearly fourteen years since it occurred !”

“To some men,” replied Bertram, reflectively, “forty years would make as little difference as fourteen or four.”

Miss Ford went off into a fit of unaffected merriment.

“Oh ! really, Mr. Bertram, you must excuse me, but I cannot help it ; it does seem so absurd to hear you talking as if Ulick had any remembrance of those days. Why, I have never heard him mention the girl's name since the affair occurred. I doubt if it ever crosses his mind ; and as for *fretting* about it—oh ! dear ; oh ! dear ; if you only knew him as *I* know him, you wouldn't talk like that.”

“I am glad to hear it,” was the curt rejoinder.

“His whole soul is in his work, as it ought to be,” continued Miss Ford, assum-

ing a high moral tone in her discourse ;
“and I’m sure I hope it will be a long day
before I see anything or anybody come be-
tween it and him. Ulick couldn’t be hap-
pier than he is, and he might be much less
happy, that’s my opinion ;” and having
none with which he could politely combat
it, Mr. Bertram changed the subject.

Meanwhile Ulick Ford was striding
through the wind and the rain on his way
to see his patients.

As has been said before, the night was
dark and intensely cold, not a night on
which to call out any man, excepting for a
case of life or death.

Dr. Ford knew well that none of the
reasons were emergent which had taken
him abroad, and yet he did not murmur,
even inwardly, at the discomforts he en-
countered, so wedded was he to the profes-
sion of his choice, and so much had he per-

sonified himself with all its duties. The first house at which he stopped was that one, at present occupied by his cousin, Lady Otho Vivian, whose note had requested him to visit her *without delay*.

“Well, Julia,” he said, kindly, as he entered the sitting-room, “nothing very wrong, I hope.”

Lady Otho was the sister who had been most like poor Cissy, in their youthful days ; and, however frivolous the occasion, Dr. Ford never left one of her messages long unattended to.

“Well ! of course we are *alive*,” she answered, rather fretfully ; “but the baby’s breathing is very heavy to-night, and nurse says that Ronald has a rash out all over his chest.”

“Let us go and see them at once then,” he responded, cheerfully. “I am afraid this is not very favourable weather for poor

baby's cold ; but we shall have a change before long."

Lady Otho conducted him up into the uncomfortable extemporised nursery, where a heavy infant, nearly choked by its own fat, was lying fast asleep, and musically breathing through its grievously-afflicted little nose ; and Master Ronald, who on account of his rash was not to be put to bed till the doctor had seen him, was sitting up before the fire, wrapped in a blanket, and trying to look as though he were going to be very ill indeed.

"Baby seems more comfortable now than she was," said the anxious mother, as she bent over the cot ; "but she has been breathing very badly, hasn't she, nurse ? and quite alarmed us. I hope she is not going to have inflammation of the chest or lungs."

Dr. Ford stood by the sleeping child

for a few seconds and regarded it silently.

“Nothing of the sort, Julia: you need not alarm yourself; the child has a heavy cold, nothing more. Wrap her up well, and don’t send her out for the next few days. And, now Ronald, my fine fellow, what’s the matter with you?”

All children loved Dr. Ford; and at this address the boy in question jumped off his nurse’s lap and ran into the extended arms of his cousin.

“A rash, sir, if you’ll please to look,” said the nurse, as she recaptured her charge, and turned down his little night-shirt—“all over his chest and arms, you see; and my lady and I thought, with the scarlatina and that so much about, that perhaps—” but, here reading utter denial of the suspicion in the doctor’s eyes, she stopped.

“Put on his night-shirt again, and put him to bed,” said Dr. Ford, quietly. “The boy has eaten something to disagree with him ; he will be all right to-morrow. And so your father and mother have returned from London ?” he added, as he prepared to follow Lady Otho downstairs again. “I saw the coachman in the town to-day.”

“Yes, they came home the day before yesterday,” she answered (she seemed to have forgotten to thank her cousin for the needless trouble he had taken on her behalf); “and Wilfred and Archy both came with them. By the bye, Ulick, have you heard that papa has received another letter from Cissy ?”

“I had not heard it.” He was following her down stairs as he spoke, and each word dropped from his lips as distinctly as though they had been sounded on a bell. A close observer might have seen that,

after uttering them, his mouth relapsed into its sternest expression; but Lady Otho was in front of him, and observed nothing.

“Yes, indeed! and it has annoyed him excessively; for Cecilia writes now as though *she* were the injured party, and makes some threat about exposing papa’s conduct to her since her marriage, which is, of course, absurd, but made him very angry. I am quite sure that, if he had had any intention of assisting her before, this letter would have effectually prevented it.”

“Is she in want, then?”

“How could she not be under the circumstances? You know they never had anything to live on.”

“And from where does she date?” They were standing face to face now in the drawing-room, but he put the question with the most supreme indifference.

“I really can’t tell you, though mamma did mention the name of the place—some fishing village where she has been ever since that wretched husband of hers deserted her. I can’t imagine why she stops there, but I suppose want of money, or this long illness of hers, has prevented her moving. It has been a miserable business altogether.”

“So it seems,” he answered, as he prepared to leave the room.

“Papa had better have been amenable, after all, hadn’t he?” laughed Lady Otho, as she leaned over the balustrades to light him down into the hall; “for poor Cissy’s sake, if not for yours, eh? Well, good night; and if baby is not better to-morrow I will let you know.” And then the hall-door was opened again, and he passed out once more into the darkness and the rain. The next house at which Dr. Ford

had to call was very different to the temporary residence of Lady Otho Vivian, being a large mansion with a wide portico, and an imposing flight of steps; having gained the summit of which, and made his advent known, the door was opened to him by one man-servant, whilst another advanced to relieve him of his dripping overcoat, and a third prepared to show him the way upstairs. It was the house of Mr. Beauclerk, a man of immense wealth and reputation, whose only daughter had been out of health for a considerable time past. At the head of the stairs Dr. Ford was met by the father himself, who eagerly drew him into a side apartment.

“ My dear doctor, why have you not been to see Miss Beauclerk so long? We have expected you for three or four days past, and her state this evening has really been so distressing that, notwithstanding the

inclemency of the weather, I was obliged to summon you."

"The weather is nothing," said Dr. Ford, indifferently. "I am only sorry to hear that my services are required. I had no anticipation of such a need arising when I saw Miss Beauclerk last."

"But you should see her every day, Dr. Ford—twice a day; her condition is so very variable."

Ulick Ford looked grave.

"If I considered it necessary, Mr. Beauclerk, I would see your daughter twice a day; but, I can assure you, it is not; and my time is so fully employed that—"

"I know it is valuable," interrupted the father; "but still, Dr. Ford, you will excuse me for saying it, money is no object with me, and my child's health is everything."

"And if I could cure her by constant

visits," replied Dr. Ford, "she should have them, were you the poorest man in Rockborough. But may I ask what new symptom it is which has alarmed you?"

"She seemed so well when you were here last," said Mr. Beauclerk; "but since then she has had fits of hysterics every day, generally an hour or two after the time that your visits are usually paid; and neither yesterday nor to-day have we been able to induce her to touch any solid food; and she has scarcely done anything but weep. Her poor mother is quite in despair about her."

"I will see Miss Beauclerk if you wish it," said Dr. Ford, dryly; but he did not seem as though he much cared about it himself. This was one of the most unpleasant and distressing cases which he had on his hands at the present moment; for the patient's disease was of the mind, and not

of the body ; and Ulick Ford had guessed the nature of that disease, yet felt bound in honour not to reveal it to her friends.

“Change of air and scene will do more for your daughter than any of my prescriptions,” he added, as they walked upstairs. “You must take her away from Rockborough.”

“So I have wished, but Emily is so strongly opposed to the idea. You must talk to her, doctor, and persuade her that it will be for her good.”

Another minute brought them into the apartment, where a very pretty girl of nineteen, attired in a white dressing-gown, was lying extended on a sofa, and watched by a lady who was evidently her mother. The usual salutations passed between them, and then Ulick Ford, having heard a second edition of the patient's symptoms from Mrs. Beauclerk, sat down by the side of the sofa

to feel her pulse. The poor little pulse, under the pressure of his fingers, commenced leaping up and down as though it had gone wild ; and then, having replaced his watch in his waistcoat pocket, he let fall the wrist he held, and turned his quiet, steady gaze upon the face of Miss Beauclerk. He found that she had risen into a half-sitting position, and, with flushed cheeks and parted lips, was staring at him as though her sentence, for life or death, depended on his words. As he met the look, no correspondent feeling, no expression, even of pity, passed into his face. I doubt if he felt any : men and women alike, we are so very hard and unsympathizing with another's hopelessness where our own hearts are not concerned.

“ I am going to prescribe a different medicine for you, Miss Beauclerk,” he said, “ than you have taken heretofore. I have

been speaking to your father about it, and my advice is that, for a little while, he takes you away from Rockborough."

"Oh, not from Rockborough!" exclaimed the girl, as she clasped her hands together. "Don't send me away from Rockborough, Dr. Ford; it will kill me, indeed it will! Let me stay here—I will be good! I will take all my tonics, and do everything you tell me, only don't let them take me away from Rockborough!"

"It will be by far the best thing for her," he said, quietly, turning to the mother. "Indeed, in my opinion, the only thing. You must not consult Miss Beauclerk in the matter: I'll engage that she will be ready enough to agree with you, by and bye."

"I won't go!" sobbed the girl, passionately, "I won't be sent away from Rockborough; you are cruel; you are

unkind ; no one cares whether I live or die !”

“ Oh, Emily, my darling,” exclaimed her mother, “ how can you say that, when you know that your father and I are only anxious to secure your health and happiness ?”

“ Which will both be sooner secured by the course I mention than by any other,” said Dr. Ford, as he rose to his feet. “ Good evening, Mrs. Beauclerk, you will continue the tonic and the shower-baths. Good evening, Miss Beauclerk ;” but the girl, lying prone with her wet face buried in the pillows, refused either to speak to or look at him.

“ You will come again to-morrow ?” said the mother, anxiously.

“ I think not. I assure you Miss Beauclerk does not require me. Meanwhile, I will have a few words with your husband on the subject.”

Outside the door he found the father with a long face waiting for him.

“ Well, Doctor, and what do you think of her ?”

“ The same as I have always done, that there is nothing the matter with her but what change of scene will rectify. Take my advice, Mr. Beauclerk, carry your daughter and your wife to Switzerland, to Germany, or to Italy, for six or twelve months, and you will bring Miss Beauclerk back as blooming as a rose, and with all this nonsense knocked out of her head. She fancies herself ill, and she will end by making herself ill ; but as for my visiting her, as you would wish me to do, it is just taking so much money out of your pockets to put it in mine, and you will excuse me for saying that I have neither the inclination nor the conscience to do it any longer.”

"Thank you, Dr. Ford, thank you very much," said Mr. Beauclerk, as he wrung the doctor's hand. "You have been a good friend to us. I shall never forget it as long as I live."

"I have never been a better friend than in this instance, when I beg you, as you value your daughter's well-being, to take her away from Rockborough."

"I will. I will consult with her mother this very night upon the subject, and make all arrangements for as speedy a removal as possible. Good-night!" and with another hearty shake of the hand, Mr. Beauclerk let the doctor go.

As he commenced again to buffet with the storm, did Ulick Ford feel that warmth about his heart which is usually supposed to accompany the commission of a good action? did he feel glad that he had had strength to do his duty, and put a temp-

tation (for to what man is it not a temptation to be loved spontaneously by a young and pretty woman ?) out of his way ?

Not a bit of it ; romance and he were too great strangers for such an idea even to enter his head, and he had so perseveringly trampled down all the tender sprigs of sentiment in his heart, that he believed the evergreen to be dead. He only clapped his hat down faster, for fear the wind should carry it away, and wondered, since the girl was fool enough to imagine she must nurse a love-sick fancy for some one, why she had not fixed on the clergyman of the parish, or her father's butler, for experiment, instead of himself.

CHAPTER III.

A TELEGRAPHIC MESSAGE.

THE next door which opened to him belonged to a house of far humbler pretensions than either of the former : a pinched quasi-respectable sort of dwelling, which was one of a long row, and, after the manner of sea-side tenements, depended much on its brothers and sisters for its means of support. Dr. Ford's gentle knock, being immediately recognised, was answered by the owner of the house itself, a large-boned, attenuated spinster, over whose naturally harsh and rugged features love and anxiety now shed an influence almost softening.

"Oh, Dr. Ford!" she exclaimed, "I knew that it was you. I have told her; I could not avoid it, she asked me the question direct."

"That is a pity," he answered quietly, as he divested himself of his wet garment. "I thought I had particularly warned you, Miss Warren, to guard her against any undue excitement."

"You did—you did—but what was I to do? She fixed her eyes upon me this evening as I was giving her her tea, and said, 'Lottie, tell me the truth, am I dying?' I have never told her a falsehood in my life, Dr. Ford, and you would not have had me do so now, and when we shall so soon be parted. My poor Annie!"

They had entered a little parlour together by this time, a dreadful little parlour, with a scarlet and green drugget, and horse-hair-bottomed chairs, and shells

ranged along the mantel-piece, and yet at that moment it seemed like a temple sacred to grief.

“You do not think that it will do her any harm?” continued Miss Warren, anxiously, “that it will hasten—hasten her—the—the end?” and the hard voice dropped into a broken whisper.

Ulick Ford laid his hand kindly upon hers.

“No, I do not! You may comfort yourself with this reflection, that nothing could have prolonged her life beyond a few more days.”

Small comfort, though, as perhaps he was aware of even as he uttered it, for the attenuated spinster had sunk down upon her knees by the small rickety table, and was sobbing bitterly beneath the shelter of her bony hands. He waited very patiently, as though he had been attending a sister

or a dear friend ; but when her grief had somewhat exhausted itself, he touched her gently on the shoulder :

“Come, Miss Warren ! remember, she still needs you ; there will be time for all this by-and-bye.”

He could have used no argument more potent with the woman before him, and as she heard it, Miss Warren rose, dried her eyes, settled her cap upon her grizzled hair, and prepared to lead him to the bedside of the invalid.

“How did she take your communication ?” he asked in a low voice, as they mounted the creaking narrow staircase.

“Like an angel !” returned the sister. “Oh ! Dr. Ford, if you had heard her speak of it, you would have said there was faith indeed. But she is sure to mention it to you.”

And in fact the first words which his

patient addressed to him on entering the room were :

“Doctor! why were you afraid to tell me? The knowledge would have made this long illness so far less hard to bear. And I have been so impatient. I fear I have been so wickedly impatient, when after all it has been but the toilsome path by which I was climbing to eternal happiness. Oh, how good God is!”

“I am glad to find you take it in this spirit,” said Ulick Ford, as he counted the rapid beatings of her weak pulse. “The news would have made some people worse, and that is why I kept it from you.”

“Ah! but those must be people who have no hope beyond the grave; poor creatures! They cannot be those who look upon it as the gate to Heaven!”

“But I must forbid your exciting yourself in this manner, you know,” he con-

tinued gravely, "or you will make yourself worse, and give your sister more trouble, which I am sure would grieve you."

"Ah! poor Lottie!" and the two women, both middle-aged, embraced each other as affectionately as though they had been girls. "And she has had so much fatigue, too, lately. I must try to be patient. But, Dr. Ford, how can I help exciting myself? Think what it must be to know for certain that in a few hours you are going straight, straight up into the very presence of the dear Lord who died for you, to kneel down at His feet, and beg Him to believe that you have tried to love Him a little. Oh! I feel as if I could not wait another hour. Lord Jesus, come quickly!" and then hearing the low weeping of her sister behind the bed-curtains, the dying woman was recalled to earth again. "Ah! dear Lottie! to be left alone; it is sad, but

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remember, dear, that it is only for a little while. Doctor! doctor! you see so many people die—tell her she must not sorrow as one without hope; that if I am going, I cannot take *Him* away from her, and that *He* is all in all.”

She sunk back upon her pillow, exhausted with so much speaking, yet watching eagerly for the response which did not come. Ulick Ford looked and felt deeply sympathetic with the grief before him, but he did not attempt to administer any such comfort to it as his patient had demanded. Yet his voice sounded very sweet as he replied :

“I am sure that your sister will come to acknowledge that what is, is best. Meanwhile she has your wants to attend to, and will be courageous for your sake. And as for yourself, I shall send you a soothing draught, which you must promise me to

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take, for you both stand sadly in need of rest."

"Not I—not I!" said the dying sister triumphantly, "I shall soon be where there is no more fatigue, nor sickness, nor sorrow; what can matter a little restlessness now? But I will take it for her sake, doctor,—for Lottie's sake."

"I am sure you will," he said, confidently; and then he exchanged farewells with her, and groped his way downstairs again.

"Was I not right?" said the tearful voice of Miss Warren, at his elbow. "Is not her faith and resignation beautiful? Oh! Dr. Ford! pray that when we come to die we may as surely anticipate the future before us."

"I will send the sleeping draught as soon as may be," was all his answer, "and I depend upon you to see that it is taken. Good night."

He was making straight for his own house then ; but as he passed through a bye-street, an Irishwoman ran out of a small greengrocer's shop and seized him by the coat-sleeve.

" Shure, and it's your own self: I thought I could niver mistake ye. Now, docther dear, come in thin and spake a word of comfort to poor Biddy, for it's crying for ye she's been all this blissed night."

He stopped at once, although he was longing to get back to his own fireside, and stooping his tall head beneath the low blackened portal, passed through the shop to a dirty room beyond.

" Well, Biddy, and how's the child ?"

" Och! docther," exclaimed a younger woman, who was weeping and rocking herself backwards and forwards before a small wood fire, " it's gone to his rast, he has, these two hours past, and me heart's just

broke intirely!" and with that she threw her apron over her head and burst into a loud and violent fit of sobbing.

"Dead!" replied the doctor, "I am very sorry to hear it. Why did you not let me know of it sooner? I would have come to see the child."

He was speaking to the woman who had summoned him from the street, and followed him into the presence of the bereaved mother.

"Shure now, and doether, you wouldn't have us be distarbing a rale gintlemin like yourself to rin backards and forrards afther a poor man's child."

"I would have you do as I tell you," he replied, sternly, "and my last orders were that I was to be told if you observed any change for the worse."

"Shure thin; and we didn't obsarve any change, unless 'twas half an hour may-

be before the darlint wint, and thin you'd wouldn't have had us lave him to inter heaven all by hisself, would ye?"

"Och hone—och hone!" wailed the mother, "he's gone thin, and I shall niver see me pretty Brian no more. Oh, docther, if you'd bin but here to see his dying eyes which said 'mother' as plain as iver his pretty tongue spake the word, you'd niver have forgot it, niver!"

"Hould over, Biddy," said the elder woman, as she stroked the hair of her companion with no ungentle touch, "don't you belave as others can fale for ye? Isn't the blissed mother of God a looking at ye this very moment, and crying wid ye, tear for tear? Ain't all the saints and angels a sorrowing for ye? Spake to her, docther, I can't put my tongue to sich things, I'm too unlearned; but you're a clever gintleman as ever was, and must know all about

it. Tell the poor craythur as she'll have her boy agin by-and-bye; give her some comfort, docther, darlint, it'll come better from your lips than from mine."

"It is scarcely time for it," he urged, in a low voice.

"Scarcely time?" she echoed loudly, 'scarcely time to tell the poor sorrowin' mother, as all the blissed company of heaven is faling for her, and how they've got her Brian, safe and sound, up there, and 'ull keep him for her agin she goes herself. And it won't be long first, Biddy, my dear; it won't be long for none of us: think of that!"

She did seem to think of it, for she stayed the violence of her weeping, and lifting her poor wearied head, laid it with closed eyes against the bosom of her warm-hearted friend. Doctor Ford rose to go: his heart bled for the rough sorrow he encountered;

but he had none but worldly comfort to administer to it, and he felt sadly, as though his place were no longer there. For all the good that he could have done that weeping mother, the necessity was past. But he pressed gold into her hand, and bade her remember that she had another child, and must bear up for its sake; and then he took his leave, followed by the thanks and blessings of both women, and feeling very much as though he were accepting gratitude to which he had no due.

As he walked homewards he felt subdued, but not more sad than usual; for the scenes he had encountered were everyday scenes to him. What did this man believe, or wish, or hope for? What were his thoughts concerning the past, the present, or the future? Neither memory, nor love, nor religion, nor death, seemed to have any effect upon him. Was it true that, as his

friends constantly affirmed, he had outlived all feeling whatsoever, excepting love for his profession? Time and occasion only can reveal.

When he reached home the door was opened to him by his own servant Wheeler, who took the opportunity to silently present him with the letters which had arrived during his absence. Why are doctors' and dentists' "familiar" always made after the same pattern, something between a mute at a funeral, and Dickens's "Littimer?" Are they bred and brought up to order, or selected on account of their promising qualities, and subjected to a strict moral training before they are admitted to the mysteries of the consulting and operating rooms? Their countenances may slightly differ, but their stereotyped manner makes them appear as one man. How noiselessly and discreetly do they open the door to

you ; how they invite your confidence, by demanding in a subdued voice if you have made an appointment with their master, and when they are satisfied that your presence there is not illegal, with what deferential solemnity do they usher you into that dismal waiting room, the table of which is strewn with "Punch" and other comic journals, and where your fellow-victims are despondently ranged around the walls. If, on their reappearance, you leap up from your chair, expecting to be admitted to the oracle before your turn has come, with what an awful look, half surprise, half reproof, do they check your impatience, as they silently bow out the lucky mortal whose ordeal is finished ; and finally, when you pass out of those mysterious doors, with what an air of respectful compassion do they send you forth to the outside world again, as if they knew quite as much about

your internal mechanism as their master, and pitied you for being so terribly in want of mending.

Wheeler was no exception to this rule: solemn, stiff and silent, every day might have been to him the day of a funeral and every patient a doomed creature. He meant it well, no doubt, and had studied his manner to suit his situation; but had any stranger stopped to think about the matter, he could hardly have taken it as a compliment to the skill of his master. Doctor Ford received the envelopes presented to him, crushed them together in his hand, and with the order, "Send round and tell Mr. Austin that I wish to speak to him," passed quickly into the dining-room, exclaiming:

"Here I am, you see, and not so much over my time, after all. Let us have something hot and strong, at once, Marcia,

and tell Wheeler to bring down my cigars --I suppose you've kept poor Bertram without one all this while; how inconsiderate you women are!"

"Well, really, Ulick, how was I to know?" was Miss Ford's remonstrance, as she left the room.

The doctor threw his letters on the table, and stooped to the blazing fire.

"A bitter night, Bertram!" he remarked, as he shivered and warmed his frozen hands; "I don't know when I have felt a colder wind; but either it or the rain must stop before long. The thermometer is still falling."

"You will not stir out again to-night?"

"Not I," was the hearty answer; "I think I have done my share of the day's work, though I'm sorry to say I must turn poor Austin out to see after one or two cases for me."

Then he turned from the fire, and took

up the crushed papers he had cast aside. One, a long, blue envelope, with "By telegraph" printed on it, caught his eye at once, and with a sudden look of vexation, he tore it open.

Bertram noted the look, and watching his face to ascertain the cause, was surprised to see the eager expression resolve itself into one so stern and cold as he had seldom viewed upon that countenance since he and Ulick Ford had called each other friend.

The broad brow became ploughed with lines of thought, the mild eyes clouded over; the lips closed upon the teeth, as they close when a man is determinately bracing himself up to undergo great torture, either of mind or body; but Bertram had hardly had time to feel surprise at so remarkable a change before the mood was past—the feeling, from whatever cause it

may have arisen, conquered, and Dr. Ford himself again, which was but another word for decisive action. With one hand he pulled the bell, with the other seized a Bradshaw from an adjoining table : having found what he desired in the pages of which, he proceeded to examine the contents of his other epistles.

Wheeler and Miss Ford re-entered the room together.

“ Wheeler ! send for a cab to go to the station at once, and pack my night-bag. I have a message here which takes me out again, and I shall not return till the morning. Have you sent to Mr. Austin ? let the boy go round to hurry him ; say I must speak to him within ten minutes.”

“ Ulick ! ” exclaimed his sister, pathetically, whilst Wheeler, who would not have expressed any surprise if his master had told him to pack his bag to go to Hades,

and who knew better even than Dr. Ford himself, what was needed on so sudden an occasion, withdrew silently to execute the orders given him.

“It’s of no use talking,” said the doctor rather testily, “an imminent case has come to hand, and I must see to it myself. Bertram, old fellow ! I’ve not had much of your company to-day, but you’ll be here again, I hope, before long. Ah ! here is Austin,” as a frank and pleasant-looking young man entered the room. “Austin ! I am off by train, at once, you must see to those two cases for me : the Carvers’ child is worse, and Mrs. Richardson will require you to-night. Tell Mr. Richardson why it is that I cannot possibly attend his wife in person.”

“You will be away long, Sir ?” said the younger man, interrogatively.

“I do not know ; it is quite impossible

to say ; but if I am not back by ten o'clock to-morrow morning, ask Dr. Elliott if he will take part of my early rounds. You will find my case book in the writing-table drawer."

"The cab is at the door, sir," announced Wheeler.

"All right ; put in the bag. You'd better remain here awhile, Austin ; and I will send back the cab for you and Bertram. Good night, Marcia ; you will see me to-morrow ;" and with a nod which included the whole company, Dr. Ford disappeared.

The trio left behind looked very blank.

He had come in so confident of spending the remainder of the evening at home, and he had whisked off so like a whirlwind that his departure left a most unsatisfactory feeling in its train.

"Where is he going to ?" demanded Bertram of Mr. Austin, as they closed in

around the fire, and helped themselves to the spirits and water which their host had left untasted.

“*I* don’t know,” he replied, shrugging his shoulders. “Nor you?” to Miss Ford.

“How should I?” she interrogated in her turn.

“It seems very strange, doesn’t it?” said Bertram.

“I should have thought you had known Dr. Ford too long to say so,” remarked Austin.

“Well! I certainly have never had anything to do with his professional concerns, but speaking from my experience I should not have called him a reticent man.”

“No? What do you say to that, Miss Ford?”

Now Miss Ford, notwithstanding that she was proud of her brother’s popularity, loved to nurse little imaginary grievances

against him, and the chief grievance of them all was that he never reposed any confidence in her. Where he went; whom he saw, and what he thought of them, were mysteries which no wheedling nor coaxing, nor reproaching, on her part could force him to reveal; and being gifted with all a woman's curiosity, she resented his conduct in this particular, as though it had been a real injury. And Mr. Austin, being well aware of her favourite weakness, was sure that his appeal would bring forth the usual results.

“What do I say to it? why, that Mr. Bertram cannot know what he's talking about! Considering that Ulick does not choose to disclose his plans even to me, I should think it was very unlikely that his friends would find him communicative. Does he ever tell us, Mr. Austin, on what errand he is going, or from which house he

has come ? I'm sure, when my own particular friend, Harriett Bruce, died last year," here Miss Ford pulled out her pocket-handkerchief, but failed to look interesting, "Ulick walked into this room, and eat his dinner as though nothing had happened, and I don't believe I should have heard of the sad event at all if I had not been in the habit of calling daily to ask after her, poor dear ! But now I always take in the 'Rockborough Gazette,' so that I may see who has been born and died during the week, for, as I tell Ulick, it must seem very strange indeed to outsiders that his own sister should be kept in the dark in these respects. But my brother is very peculiar in some things ; very peculiar indeed ; and I should be sorry for his own sake, that he should hear all that people have said of his omission in this particular," and Miss Ford wagged her

head solemnly as she recalled some of the remarks made by sympathetic tabbies on the melancholy subject. It was so sweet to be able to cast just a little wee stone at Ulick behind his back, because to his face she stood so wholesomely in awe of him.

Meanwhile, the doctor having caught the train, threw himself in the corner of a first-class carriage in a state of mind which would have puzzled his own brain to describe. He was alone, and after a few minutes of confused thought, he suddenly dived his hand into the pocket of his coat, and produced the telegram which had called him forth. The paper was crumpled and disfigured from the rough treatment to which it had been subjected, but Dr. Ford smoothed it carefully, and spread it out upon his knee, and pored over it as though he half doubted whether on a first perusal he had read the words aright.

But there was no mistake, either in substance or address ; and even by the dim carriage-lamp the large official handwriting looked back upon him legibly.

“From Mrs. Fleming—Saltpool.

“To Dr. Ford—Rockborough.

“‘I am dying and alone ; if you ever cared for me, you will come to me now—I have no hope left, but in you.’”

He stared at it—this message from his buried past—as though the dumb characters could tell him something further ; and then, crushing the paper once more into his pocket, he leant back with closed eyes, upon the carriage cushions, and delivered himself up to thought.

CHAPTER IV.

CISSY'S DEATH-BED.

“**S**ALTPPOOL! Saltpool! Saltpool!”
sounded in the short, sharp tones of the guard, as he ran along the line of arrested carriages. Dr. Ford started from his seat and hastily collected his belongings. During the whole of that long three-hours’ railway journey he had not once permitted himself to be overtaken by sleep; indeed, his mind had been too actively employed for the body to gain ascendancy over it; and yet, so deep had been his reverie, that he opened and shut his eyes, and stumbled down the carriage steps like a man just roused from slumber. It was now twelve

o'clock. The night was still intensely dark, but the rain had ceased, and a sharp, frosty feeling become apparent in the air. The whistle sounded ; the long train of carriages moved slowly away, and Dr. Ford found himself the only passenger left standing on a small, soaked-through, uncovered platform, where a solitary porter was waiting to take his ticket.

"Is there no one to meet you, sir?" he demanded, as he did so.

"No. Is it far from Saltpool?"

"About a mile and a half; but a nasty road, sir."

"Can I procure any conveyance to take me there?"

"There's nothing to be got nearer than the place itself, and I've no one at present that I could send for you."

"Then I must walk. Will you direct me in which way?"

“Straight on ahead, sir,” replied the man, as he followed Dr. Ford through the station wicket and pointed to a country road stretched out before them, “and you can hardly miss it. It isn’t much of a path, but the hedge runs the whole way, till it brings you to the slaughter-house, and t’other side of that you’ll come to the street itself. Thank you, sir,” as an equivalent dropped in his hand; “and I hope you’ll find it without much trouble.” With which the porter retreated to the station-room fire, whilst Ulick Ford commenced to plod bravely in the direction intimated to him. A country road, ancle-deep in mud, is not a pleasant promenade at twelve o’clock at night in the month of March, even when the route is most familiar; but to tread a strange path under such circumstances, unknowing into what evils the next step may not plunge you, nor for what length of time

the martyrdom may be prolonged, is sufficient to make even a bold man feel a little faint-hearted and disposed to rail at Fate. Yet not a murmur escaped the lips of Dr. Ford, who was too well immured to hardship to care for inconvenience ; and if a thought crossed his mind respecting the journey before him, it was to congratulate himself that the rain had ceased, and rendered it, comparatively speaking, easy. Used as he was to sudden calls and emergencies of all kinds, his brain was still in a whirl with the shock it had received that night, for, contrary to the speculations of his sister and the surmises of his friends, Ulick Ford had not yet forgotten *what had been*, and, as he groped his way along the muddy and irregular country path, carrying his bag in his hand, his mind wandered away from the present far back into the past, when he had hoped that Cissy Hal-

sted's hands would close his dying eyes. It was fourteen years since he had endured the blow of learning that she was faithless to him, and he had never seen her since—never written to her—never even mentioned her name, excepting when it was of necessity forced upon him. One or two letters, transcribed in a weakly-attempted palliation of her fault, had, shortly after her marriage, reached him ; but he had put them sternly aside, unable to sympathize with any feeling so foreign to his own nature, and since then the tidings of his early love had been few and far between. At first her relations had avoided mention of her, as a subject distasteful both to him and to themselves ; and, latterly, their own communication with her had been most irregular. He knew that she was living, and he asked no further. What was it to him now whether she lived or died ? So

Ulick Ford told himself, and would have told others had there been occasion, but it was not the truth.

Because he was silent ; because he poured out to no one the burthen of his sorrow, his relations argued that he did not feel ; whereas God and his own soul only knew how much the man had suffered.

By night, in the privacy of his own chamber, by day in the barren solitude of his heart ; in leisure, when memory would mockingly intrude herself upon him, and in occupation, when he had to strain each nerve before he could command attention, he had suffered until feeling had become deadened ; the force of suffering seemed spent, and his trust in the wisdom which guides all things, shaken. To some natures it is as difficult to uproot a well-planted passion as to detach an oak tree from the soil. And yet, futile as had been his ef-

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forts to banish the image of Cissy Halsted from his heart, he had instituted so rigorous a law for his own actions with regard to her, that it is doubtful if he would have gone to her assistance on any occasion less urgent than her deathbed. But when he had received that telegram, worded by her dying lips, and with the remembrance of what Lady Otho Vivian had told him, freshly in his mind, he could not choose—he, who had never been known to disregard a pauper's cry for help—but hasten to the relief of the woman who was to have been his, and would so soon be no one's. His heart, busy with such thoughts, and his mind, full of curious, wondering questions, it is no marvel that the walk seemed short to him, and that he found himself in Salt-pool before knowing it. Having passed the slaughter-house alluded to by the porter, a rapid, stony descent brought him quickly

to the village ; but, as he threaded the narrow street, he looked in vain on either side for a lighted house where he might make inquiries for his cousin. But none such appeared. Saltpool was evidently unused to keep late hours, and Dr. Ford considered himself fortunate when he, at length, ran against a sign-post, thus discovering the whereabouts of the village inn. A continuous hammering of his stick against the door, and a few lusty shouts, brought in due time a dishevelled landlady and half-caparisoned ostler to his aid ; when, upon making his desires known, the latter was ordered to light him to the apartments occupied by Mrs. Fleming.

“ Up at Mrs. Mitchell’s,” said the landlady, sharply, in explanation to the unwilling ostler. “ You’re never going to pretend, Roger, as you don’t know where the poor lady lays a-dying ? I’m afraid you’ve had

but a cold walk, sir. Can I get you any refreshment?"

No. Dr. Ford would not stay for any refreshment, though he made the landlady happy by ordering a room and breakfast to be ready for him on the following morning.

"Can you tell me who is in attendance upon Mrs. Fleming?" he demanded.

"Oh, surely, sir, Mr. Burrell, our own medical gentleman! and as clever a gentleman as ever stepped. I'm sure when our William had the quinsy, he—"

"Where could I speak with Mr. Burrell?"

"Well, sir, he must be up with the lady, I reckon, for she has been very bad all day. Mrs. Mitchell was here two hours ago herself, and they didn't think then as the poor dear could last through the night."

"I must go at once," said the doctor,

hastily. "Is your man ready? Let him carry my bag, I may want it;" and preceded by the ostler with a stable-lantern, Ulick Ford soon found himself at Mrs. Mitchell's door. Some one was evidently stirring within, for his summons was answered as soon as made, and a stout country woman showed him into a small sitting-room.

"Is Mr. Burrell here?"

"Yes, sir, he is upstairs."

"Give him my card, and say I wish to speak to him;" and in another minute a rosy-cheeked little man was in the room, all bustle and flutter at being introduced to *the* Dr. Ford of Rockborough.

The usual preliminaries having being gone through :

"Perhaps you are aware," commenced Ulick Ford, in that measured voice with which he knew so well how to disguise all

feeling; "that I received a telegram this evening from Mrs. Fleming to say that her state was considered dangerous, and to request my presence here."

"I am aware of it," replied Mr. Burrell ; "indeed, when Mrs. Fleming expressed a wish to see you, and to have your advice, I urged the sending of the message, although I am afraid you come too late to do more than give her comfort."

"Her complaint?" said the other, interrogatively.

"Her present attack, from which I have no hesitation in saying she is in the greatest danger, is inflammation of the lungs ; but Mrs. Fleming has been out of health for many years past."

And then the two men sat down together at the table, and entered into a detailed conversation on the state of the patient, during which Ulick Ford forgot himself in his pro-

fession, and discussed her symptoms as phlegmatically as though she had been a stranger to him.

"She has suffered much both in mind and body," said Mr. Burrell, in conclusion. "A great want of energy apparent, if you will excuse my saying so."

"I had not heard of her ill-health ; it is some years since I have had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Fleming."

"When I learnt that you were a relation of hers," continued the country doctor, bluntly, "I was surprised that she had not appealed to you before."

"If she had done so I would have come before," he answered simply, and Mr. Burrell thought that for so great a man Dr. Ford was wonderfully affable and quiet.

"You must have had a very unpleasant journey, sir," he remarked. "Had I thought it possible you could arrive so

soon, I would have sent my chaise to meet you at the station. Can I offer you anything, or would you like to see the patient at once?"

"I will go and see the patient if she is ready to receive me."

"She was but half sensible when I left her," said Mr. Burrell, as they mounted to the upper storey, "and indeed she has been wandering all day; but she has intervals of consciousness, and doubtless will recognise you when they occur. Well, Mrs. Mitchell," to a woman who met them at the head of the stairs, and curtsied low to the new comer, "and how does our patient seem now?"

"Very weak, sir, very low and quite light-headed. Can I help you, sir? Have you dropped anything?" This to Ulick Ford, who had suddenly stooped towards his boot-lace.

"No, thanks! no, thanks!" he uttered hurriedly, "it is all right;" and then he stood erect, and followed Mr. Burrell to the sick chamber.

How little did they guess who watched him—the famous surgeon whose cool nerve and physical endurance had made his name known far and wide—that in that moment of delay he had turned coward, and was silently gathering courage wherewith to face the woman he had loved. Mr. Burrell having entered the bed-room first, turned round and beckoned his companion.

"She is just as I left her," he said, in a low voice. "You can enter with the greatest impunity," and Ulick Ford, with a sudden straightening of himself, as though to make sure his armour fitted him, stepped forward firmly, and stood at the bottom of the bed. The room was dimly lighted, but not so dimly but that he could perfectly

discern the figure lying there ; yet had he not been assured that it was she, he never should have recognised his cousin, Cissy Halsted. The golden hair which used to appear to him as the aureole of some angelic creature, dulled and thinned and streaked with grey, lay matted on her pillow ; her bloom had all departed ; her hollow eyes, open, but without expression, had lost their brilliancy ; she was a mere wreck of what she had been. Ulick Ford advanced to her side, and examined her gravely, almost solemnly, for a few minutes, then he turned hastily away, and lifting a corner of the white blind which shaded the window, professed to look out upon the starless night. He had seen at a glance that the country doctor's estimate was just, and that his cousin had not many hours to live. Whether he might or might not have cured her, had he been called in sooner, he

would not ask himself, for the question was now futile, her disease having reached that stage when professional skill could be of no avail. But a brief, a very brief space of time, and she would be no longer there. He was about to part with her in real earnest now.

"Love strikes one hour—LOVE! those never loved,
Who dream that they loved ONCE."

Had any one quoted such lines to Ulick Ford that morning, he would have laughed at them outwardly, and inwardly been ready to cite his own case as contradiction of their truth. Now, as he stooped his head behind the white blind of Mrs. Mitchell's meagrely-clothed window, and the conviction thrust itself upon him that that chapter of his life which had begun so sweetly, and ended in such bitterness, must close; a child's voice, the carol of a bird, a gleam of sunshine, would have had power to overthrow his forti-

tude. How long he stood and mused there little matters. It was Mr. Burrell's chirping voice that recalled him from his reverie, and with a start he turned again towards the bed.

"Mrs. Fleming feels better again now, Dr. Ford. You know me, do you not, madam? Ah! I thought so," as a wintry smile repaid his efforts to attract her; "and here is your cousin, Dr. Ford, who has travelled all the way from Rockborough to see you."

"Cousin Ulick!" faintly exclaimed the dying woman, and then, even in that hour, a flush of shame passed over her pale features, and she turned away her head, and buried her face in the pillow.

Ulick Ford drew a chair to the bedside, and took her hand, and Mr. Burrell seized the opportunity to leave the cousins to themselves.

"How good of you to come," she murmured brokenly, as she felt the warm clasp of his fingers.

"Did you doubt my doing so, Cissy?" he answered, gently.

"I cannot tell—every one has deserted me—no one has answered my letters, and you, I wronged you so."

Aye! she *had* wronged him; how much his own soul, on which the blight of his life seemed equally to have descended, could alone have answered. Could Ulick Ford have found it in his heart to tell the whole hard truth to the dying creature beside whom he sat, he might have proved to her that the injury wrought to him by her want of faith, exceeded far the woe which it occasioned. He might have told her that the knowledge of her falsehood had made him disbelieve in much which before he had never dared to doubt; that with the sun-

shine of her love, God's presence seemed to leave the world for him, and himself to be uncared for and unthought of, either by heaven or earth. He might have told her that in trifling with his strong affection, she had kindled a fire which eat into his heart, and left him alike indifferent to love or fame or religion. He might have reproached her with all this ; had he been a woman, he probably would have done so, if solely for the pleasure of extending a divine forgiveness afterwards : but he was not only a man, strong enough to pity weakness, and conscious that no explanations could restore him what was lost, but a doctor, anxious by all means to avoid any emotion which could make his patient worse, although by no knowledge in his power could he make her better ; and so, when Mrs. Fleming sadly murmured, "I wronged you so," the cloud which passed

over his features was all the token which betrayed that her words pained him.

“Do not let us speak of that,” he answered quietly, “or rather let me say at once, Cissy, that it is all forgiven and forgotten. I should be hard, indeed, could I have cherished resentment against anyone, most of all yourself, for so long a time.”

Then she lifted her worn face and looked in his, and shed weak tears.

“Oh! but you are changed—you are sadly, sadly changed; and it is all my doing.”

“We are both changed; you, still more than I am, Cissy: it is impossible it could be otherwise—remember how many years it is since last we met. But I am sorry to find you so ill; I came here, hoping to be of some professional aid to you.”

“But you cannot—I am dying!” she interrupted him. He would not gainsay he

words, although her wistful eyes seemed as though they pleaded for a respite.

"I *am* dying," she repeated despondently, "dying without a creature to regret me."

He bit his lip, and looked at her in silence.

"If you have any wishes that you desire to see fulfilled," he continued, presently, "any message to be carried to your parents, who cannot have been properly apprised of your condition, look on me as a brother, and make what use of me you may."

"My child!" she gasped, for she was breathing with the utmost difficulty; "Ulick! you must take my child to them."

Dr. Ford started. This was not the first intimation he had received that his cousin was a mother, but he had heard, or

imagined he had heard, that she had lost her children in infancy ; and the announcement came as news to him—news which caused a pang.

“Your child!” he echoed. “I did not know there was one—a boy?”

“No, no, a little girl ; so friendless—so alone. Take her to Frampton—to my father—tell him he must receive her—she has no one else ;” and then, as he was silent, she continued anxiously, “He must have it in his heart to relent—else why has he sent me money—often, often—who but he would do it?”

“What of your husband?”

He put the question firmly, but it was in a very subdued voice.

“Gone away—dead, for aught I know—will never trouble them.”

But Dr. Ford looked grave. He was not sure that the Frampton people would

view the matter in the same light that she did ; it was a serious undertaking to promise to present the child of the drawing-master to their notice ; and the dying mother saw the look, and guessed the meaning of it.

“ Oh ! my poor child ! my poor child ! ” she wildly exclaimed, as she feebly threw her wasted arms about, “ no one will take her—no one will love her—she will die as I am dying—all alone.”

He saw what harm the agitation was causing her, and promptly interfered.

“ Cissy ! ” he said, in a firm voice, as he laid his strong gentle hand upon her feverish frame ; “ I am your doctor, now, you know ; you must attend to what I say : lie still and listen to me. You remember the old days, Cissy, when you fancied that you cared for me—I never broke a promise to you then ; you cannot

think that I would do so now. I will take your child to Frampton, and recommend her by every persuasion I can think of to your father's care, and if he refuses to accept the charge" — the large blue eyes were fixed hungrily upon his face—"I will see, unless the right be wrested from me, that she is reared and looked after as befits her station. Will you believe me, and set your mind at rest?"

"*You?*—Ulick—*you*. *You* would do so much for *me*?" she said, in a strange low voice of wonder.

"Why not, my dear?" he answered, unconcernedly, and to speak so was the greatest effort he had made. "After all, remember we are cousins, and—you made me very happy whilst it lasted, Cissy."

The great hand was taken prisoner in her burning palms, and carried to her lips. He drew it hastily away.

“I am not worthy!” she cried in a voice of sudden anguish; and the temporary excitement over, a crisis arrived in her disease which resolved itself into an attack of convulsions—an event not unlooked for, although it had occurred rather earlier than expected. Dr. Ford rang the bell, and Mr. Burrell and Mrs. Mitchell were in immediate attendance.

“She will not recover consciousness again,” he said, in a low voice, as the other doctor joined him, “and it will be over before long. She has no strength to stand against a second attack.”

So he spoke, without a falter in his voice, or a shade of trouble in his eye, as he supported the convulsed and fragile body of the woman he loved best on earth. No one who saw him could have guessed how fast beneath that calm exterior his wounded heart was beating.

At his announcement Mrs. Mitchell lost her nerve.

“Going, sir; is she really going?” she exclaimed, wringing her hands, “poor lady—the Lord have mercy on us! O! I must waken the child; I must call the child—she’d never forgive me if the little gal wasn’t alongside of her when she breathed her last.”

“Stay where you are!” interposed the voice of Dr. Ford. It was neither raised nor angry, but it effectually commanded the obedience of Mrs. Mitchell. “You may be wanted, and this is no fit scene for a child!”

Submissively she dropped into a chair, whilst the medical men continued to hang over their dying patient, and interchange observations on her condition. Presently they thought of something which might be needed, and Mr. Burrell left the room to

fetch it ; at the same time a young voice was heard to call over the upper banisters, "Mrs. Mitchell, Mrs. Mitchell, how is mamma ?"

"It is Miss Petronel," exclaimed Mrs. Mitchell, in dismay. "She is coming downstairs."

"Keep her away," said Dr. Ford, authoritatively, as each convulsion of the expiring frame was weaker than the last, and the end was evidently near.

Mrs. Mitchell hurried out to do his bidding : they were once more alone together. He raised the dying face to his, and gazed earnestly upon it ; and as he did so placidity stole over it again—the features lay at rest ; the weak lips parted with a sigh, the dim eyes opened and returned his gaze.

Death was even then upon them ; yet, through their fast glazing orbs he could

discern the question which her tongue refused to utter—the anxious question, if she were forgiven; and he answered it by bending down his mouth to hers. The action seemed to be the signal for her soul's dismissal; for with the very faintest smile the lips of woman ever wore, she closed her eyes again, shivered once or twice, and stretching herself out very gently on his breast, lay back, and went in peace.

He held her for a few seconds in his arms, and then very softly indeed, he replaced upon the bed the corpse of Cissy Fleming.

Voices were heard in argument upon the stairs, and he was about to go forward with the news, and bid them keep silence, when the door of the bedchamber was suddenly pushed open, and the figure of a girl of thirteen appeared upon the threshold.

“Leave me alone, Mrs. Mitchell!” she was saying, with childish command; “if mamma is ill, I am the proper person to be with her.”

Ulick Ford started to his feet and gazed at her in silent astonishment.

On the bed before him he had just placed the dead body of his early love—a wreck of the beautiful girl whom he remembered in past days; and as he did so the thought had flashed across his mind that now, indeed, all that concerned that time had died with her, and he should not even have the memory of her youthful face to haunt his loneliness. When before him stood what seemed like an apparition of the past—a ghost evoked by his vain longings for all that he had lost—a richer incarnation of the loveliness once possessed by Cissy Halsted. Startled, humid, grey eyes, set wide apart in a broad white forehead, over which

the hair hung in a golden fringe ; a *piquante* nose, contradicting the soft expression of the eyes ; pointed chin, with a deep dimple in it ; a curved mouth, displaying firm and even teeth, and over all a cloud of golden-brown hair, with here and there a darker shade athwart it. Such was Petronel Fleming as she first appeared to Ulick Ford.

A tall girl, too, who carried her thirteen summers bravely, standing upright as a young poplar, and who, although younger by three years than her mother had been when first he saw her, looked almost as old as she had done. What wonder if the sight of her—recalling, as it did, the memory of the dead creature before him, as he had last seen her in the blossom of her youth, or as she had visited him in his half-waking, feverish dreams—thrilled through him with fresh pain !

He attempted to say something to his

little cousin which should prepare her for the news of her mother's death ; but, before he could find his voice, she had caught sight of the motionless figure on the bed, and darted forward to his side.

CHAPTER V.

THE STORY OF PETRONEL.

“**I** SHALL never forget—no! not if I live for five hundred years (which, when I come to think of it, is, to say the least, unlikely)—the first day that I saw Cousin Ulick. It was when we were living down at Saltpool.

“We had been at Saltpool for some time, mamma and I—how long I can hardly tell—but so long that I had but very little recollection of any other place, and we never saw anyone down there excepting Mr. Burrell, and we were poor, and sometimes very dull. Mr. Burrell was our doctor, and I didn’t like him, because he used to

pull my hair and call me 'Dunce Double D,' and tell mamma I must take a dose of Gregory's powder every morning to stop my growing, and she used to believe him. Besides, I always observed that mamma cried more after Mr. Burrell had been to see her, and said she made no progress, and never should make any as long as she remained in that hateful place. Yet she never tried to leave Saltpool; nor would she tell me when I asked the reason why; but Betsy Mitchell said we could not go because we had no money, and I was child enough to rest satisfied with that reply. But I sometimes wished we had a little more, if it were only to make my mother happy. She had been very sick, my poor mother, ever since I could remember. She was very pale and pretty, with yellow hair like mine; but she would cry for hours together, till her eyes were all red and swollen, and her head

ached so that she could hardly speak. She never went for a nice walk along the rocks or came and sat down on the beach with me ; but lay on the sofa all day, sometimes with a book, sometimes doing nothing at all, and often reading old letters and papers, over which she would weep until she made herself ill. I had a mighty compassion for my mother in those days—a great longing to make her as strong and well as I was—to take her up in my arms and carry her away to some nice pretty place, where she should be comfortable and happy, and have everything she wanted, and never see Mr. Burrell, nor one of those tiresome old letters again. But I was so impotent to serve her. Nothing that I could do seemed to be of any use. Sometimes I would stay in from my play to wait upon her, and would hang about her sofa or her bed ; but, after a while, she always sent me away. I

was too boisterous, she said ; too rough in my manners and too loud in my speech, and I did her more harm than good. When she said this I used to feel very sad, and go up to my own room and have a good cry. I knew that I was rough and noisy—Mr. Burrell often told me so—but it was dreadful to think that I should make my mother worse by it ; and when I used to try and be so gentle by her side, because I loved her ! Sometimes mamma would ask me to read aloud, and then I was very proud, and fetched the volume with alacrity. But I was a shocking bad reader, for I had had no education ; and, after I had stumbled over a few pages, I was invariably told it was enough, and I might put the book away. And then my mother would say I had had less advantages than many a pauper's child, and it was a shame that her own daughter should lack the

necessaries of life ; and if I had only seen the style in which she used to live in her father's house, I should be able to understand what she meant. But I had never seen it : my earliest recollections were only of this sorrowing, suffering mother, who scarcely ever thought of my redundant health and buoyant spirits, in her lamentations over my want of polish and shoe-leather. But her strictures on the subject of my deficient education were unfortunately correct. It is a dreadful thing to have to confess that, at thirteen years old, I could not read or write properly ; but neither could Betsy Mitchell—and the amount of instruction we had received was about equal. I can remember that, when first we went to Saltpool, I was sent to a small school in the neighbourhood for a few hours daily ; but the last two years I was left to run as wild as a colt, and the little learning

I had acquired was speedily forgotten. We had but one sitting-room, and my poor mamma was never able to bear any noise ; and so, summer and winter, I used to be turned out of the house all day with Betsy Mitchell, and scarcely ever appeared at home excepting for my meals, which I generally took in the kitchen, because the smell of meat made my mother feel sick. Betsy Mitchell was a very nice girl—a charming girl, I used to think her in those days, with her black hair and eyes and her rosy cheeks ; and such friends were we that I never remember to have had a quarrel with her, excepting upon one occasion, when she set on Tommy Miller, the baker's boy, to say that I had a pug nose and red hair.

“ ‘ If my hair is red, my mother's hair is red,’ I exclaimed, triumphantly.

“ ‘ And so it is,’ repeated the daring Tommy.

“Now I don’t think I should have so much minded his remark upon my nose, for I had a private suspicion, maintained to this hour, that it turned up rather more at the tip than those of the Grecian models do ; but a reflection on my mother’s soft yellow hair, which I used to smooth down with such pride—my poor mother who was too sick to resent such impertinence on her own behalf—was more than I could bear with equanimity. And so I set to and had a regular ‘round’ with Tommy Miller, knocking him about with my sturdy young fists, until I sent him wailing to his mother ; and then I walked home to mine, without vouchsafing so much as a backward glance to Betsy Mitchell. Nor would I speak to her again in my offended dignity, until she crept up to my bedside that evening and humbly begged my pardon, which I generously extended to her, cou-

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pled with an invitation to share my couch, and we slept in each other's arms all night, as though we had been born of the same parents. So, that although I associated with the village boys and girls as familiarly as if they had been my brothers and sisters, and even on occasions condescended to 'close in' with them, I managed to maintain a certain rank amongst the rough little crew, who, whilst calling me 'Miss Pet' to my face, always spoke of me as the 'young lady' behind my back. Yet, what a life it was for a child of gentle birth! Scrambling over the rocks after sea-birds' eggs, or lying at full length amongst the long grass, making daisy-chains and cowslip balls, in summer; and loitering about the blacksmith's forge, or the farmers' barns, or the inn kitchen, in winter, I spent my time just as the labourers' children who were too young to work spent theirs, and

with more harm to myself, from being old enough to understand and remember much that I should never have heard. From mixing also with companions younger and lower in station than I was, I became imperious and domineering, ordering them about as though I had been their mistress, yet lowering myself to quarrel with them, as if they had been my equals.

“All this time I have mentioned but one of my parents ; that is, because, to my recollection, I never saw the other. There was a very dim faint memory floating in my mind of another place of residence than Saltpool ; which was totally different from Saltpool in every respect, and where there had been a gentleman whom I called ‘papa.’ I did not know till afterwards that that place was in France.

“When first we settled in our present home, I had asked my mother where my

father was, and she had said, 'gone away on a long journey,' and I accepted her answer as decisive, and thought no further about it, for I must have been but a little creature at that period, not more than seven years old. But the next time I put the question, some years later, I was told in an uncertain manner that he was dead; that I should never see my father more: and the announcement was made with such a fit of weeping that I was afraid to renew the subject. And yet I never remembered to have seen my mother dressed in mourning, nor to have worn a black frock myself, which struck me at the moment as rather strange; but my father was not necessary to my happiness, and so I soon forgot the circumstance, and made the village believe what I believed myself, that I had no parent but the one with whom I lived.

"I was born in the blustering month of

March, and so I had just completed my thirteenth year when my poor mother was seized with her last illness. How little I thought it was her last ! She had always complained so much ; she had always been so weak, and delicate, and fragile, that when she caught a bad cold and was obliged to keep her bed, I imagined it was but a repetition of what had occurred a hundred times before. I remember that I crept into her room, night and morning, to ask if I could do anything to serve her, and that she complained of a great deal of pain in her chest, but said that she had everything she wanted. And Mrs. Mitchell, who was nursing her, begged me not to ‘bounce’ in and out of the room any more, as Mr. Burrell had said my mamma was to be kept as quiet as possible. Quietness and I were strangers ; I knew that well enough : and so I wandered away

during the daytime as usual, and only felt a little sorry each time I recalled the fact that my mamma had such bad pain to bear. But on the day of her death Mrs. Mitchell excited my curiosity and anxiety for the first time. I had been out for a long ramble with my friend Betsy, and we were late for the one o'clock dinner, which was set for us in the kitchen.

“‘Now, Miss Pet,’ exclaimed Mrs. Mitchell, as we reappeared, ‘you and Betsy must put up with what you can get for dinner to-day, for I’ve had more work than enough upstairs, and no time to think about the cooking, far less look after it.’

“‘Never mind!’ I answered carelessly, as we sat down to hard dumplings and cold meat; ‘anything will do; we’re both so hungry. But how is mamma, Mrs. Mitchell? is the pain in her chest better?’

“‘Well, my dear, it easier; but I’m

afraid the doctor don't take it as a particular good sign ; and she's terrible weak, to be sure. But I believe,' with an oracular nod, 'as there's another gentleman been telegraphed for to come and see her.'

" 'Another *gentleman* !' I exclaimed, throwing down my knife and fork ; ' what good should a gentleman do her ?'

" 'Another doctor, my dear ; but don't speak so loud, Miss Pet : sounds do reach so easy upstairs.'

" 'And what's the use of another doctor ?' I persisted ; 'hasn't mamma got Mr. Burrell ? They can't give her two kinds of medicine at once, Mrs. Mitchell !'

" Mrs. Mitchell looked puzzled.

" 'Well, no, my dear, I don't suppose they can ; but the gentlemen will talk a deal, and see what's best to be done for her, poor lady !'

" 'Is mamma very ill, Mrs. Mitchell ?'

“ ‘Lor’ bless you, my pretty! no!’ replied the good woman, as she laid her rough hand on my head, ‘she’ll be ever so much better by-and-bye, you’ll see; but I mustn’t stand talking here, or maybe she’ll want me.’

“ ‘Mayn’t I go with you?’ I asked, quite humbly. Something in the manner of her speaking had awakened a painful sensation of anxiety in my breast.

“ ‘Better not, Miss Pet,’ was the reply. ‘Mr. Burrell, he’s awful particular about her being kept quite quiet, so you must rest here, my dear, and take your dinner along of Betsy!’

“But Mrs. Mitchell’s news had completely spoiled my appetite, and as soon as she had disappeared, I pushed my plate away, and went into our own little parlour. I could not understand why my mother should require the services of another

medical man. We had lived in Saltpool now for so many years, and she had so often been ill, and yet I had never heard any one speak of the probability of her wanting more than one doctor before. In my youthful ideas, one doctor was sufficient infliction at a time for any one, and two only conveyed the notion of a double quantity of physic and other obnoxious remedies. My poor mamma! I remained in the little cold parlour, in which no one had considered it worth while to light a fire, sadly brooding over what I had heard, until the short March afternoon had resolved itself into dusk, and my fingers were blue and frozen. Then I crept off the sofa, where I had been sitting cross-legged, and upstairs to my mother's bed-room door, and laid my ear against the keyhole. All was silent within, and I thought I might venture to enter, but at the first creak of the opening

door, Mr. Burrell was on the threshold.

“ ‘What do you want, my child?’ he said, in a far gentler tone than he was used to speak to me.

“ ‘I want to see mamma!’ I replied. ‘Let me in, Mr. Burrell, I have not kissed her since the morning.’

“ ‘If I let you kiss her, will you promise me to go away directly afterwards, and to have your tea and go to bed without giving any trouble, like a good child?’

“ ‘Yes, I promise!’

“ ‘I can trust you, Petronel?’

“ ‘I don’t tell lies, Mr. Burrell,’ I answered, shortly. At which he opened the door wider, and let me pass through. I had promised that I would be quiet and docile, and I kept my word. I walked on tip-toe to my mother’s side, and looked at her in silence.

“She was lying quite still, although her eyes were open, and I thought that she was half asleep. I stooped down and kissed her gently, and then she raised her eyelids and looked full at me.

“‘Not yet, not yet!’ she said, in a hurried thick voice. ‘I called, but there is no answer—darkness everywhere; I feel, though I cannot see it!’

“‘Mamma, mamma! I am Pet!’ I exclaimed, in affright. ‘Oh! Mr. Burrell, what is the matter?’

“‘Nothing, nothing whatever, my dear child,’ he said, as he laid his hand upon my shoulder, and pushed me towards the door. ‘Mamma is a little feverish to-night, and doesn’t quite know what she is saying, but she will be better to-morrow. Now, you must remember your promise to me, or I shall not let you come in here again.’

“‘I do remember it!’ I replied, as I

walked downstairs, but I cried bitterly the while. I knew now that my mother had something worse than an ordinary cold, but I was very far from guessing the real truth. When it was time for me to go to bed, and in those days I was generally fast asleep by eight o'clock, Mrs. Mitchell came down into the kitchen, and I could see she had been crying also. This fact again roused my suspicions.

“ ‘Mrs. Mitchell!’ I demanded, quickly, ‘why have you been crying?’

“ ‘Crying, Miss Pet!’ she said, reddening as she spoke, ‘whatever put such a fancy as that in your head?’

“ ‘I can see it by your eyes,’ I replied, stoutly. ‘Is mamma worse? Oh, do tell me!’

“ ‘Bless the child! she can’t think of nothing but her mamma! No, of course she isn’t worse; didn’t you hear what Mr.

Burrell told you, Miss Pet, that she'd be ever so much better to-morrow ?

“ ‘But if she is to have another doctor, she *must* be worse,’ I persisted.

“ ‘Oh, drat the other doctor, then ! we won’t say nothing more about him, if it’s to make you fret. Now, Miss Pet, Mr. Burrell’s orders is that you’re to eat a hearty tea, and then go comfortable to bed, and we’ll have good news for you, please God, to-morrow morning.’

“ ‘I don’t want any tea, thank you, Mrs. Mitchell.’

“ ‘But Mr. Burrell’s orders—’

“ ‘What is Mr. Burrell to me ?’ I cried, impetuously. ‘I’m not sick. I don’t want to eat, and I won’t eat, so there’s an end of it !’

“I suspected they were conspiring to deceive me, and the suspicion made me fractious. —I suppose they did it kindly,

was, whether that other doctor had arrived, and what he said about mamma. Having wondered for a few moments, I felt that I must inquire, and for that purpose left my bed, slipped on a flimsy dressing-gown, and walked out on the landing. All was very still and silent; a tallow candle, with a long wick, was spluttering away on the folding table outside my mother's room; but though I listened for several minutes, I could hear no sound, either of persons moving about or talking. Presently the door opened rather hastily, and Mr. Burrell came out.

“ ‘ Mr. Burrell,’ I said in a low whisper, ‘ how is mamma ?’ But he passed on without hearing me, and ran downstairs, and then my anxiety got the better of my prudence, and I called out louder :

“ ‘ Mrs. Mitchell ! Mrs. Mitchell, how is mamma ?’

“ I stood silent after making this appeal, for I feared I had done wrong, and in another minute I was sure of it. Mrs. Mitchell, with very red eyes, came bustling out of my mother’s room ; but it was only to order me back to mine.

“ ‘ The new doctor’s here, Miss Pet,’ she said, in whispered explanation, ‘ and he says as your poor mamma is very bad ; and you’re to be kept away from her by all means.’

“ ‘ *Very bad !* ’ I repeated, ‘ is she worse ? ’

“ ‘ Oh ! lor’, dear child ! don’t go for to ask me,’ was the sobbing reply, ‘ but just get back to your bed, and lie quiet till the morning ; do, there’s a dear ! ’

“ ‘ Lie quiet,’ I echoed, indignantly, ‘ when my mother is so ill. I won’t do any such thing ; I shall go down stairs and stay with her ! ’

“ ‘ You *can’t*, my dear ! ’ exclaimed Mrs.

Mitchell, in alarm, as she attempted to restrain me, 'it's the new doctor's particular orders, as you are kept out of the room.'

"'Leave me alone, Mrs. Mitchell,' I said, loftily, as I wrested myself from her grasp, 'if mamma is ill, I am the proper person to be with her ;' and with that I ran down the remaining stairs, and pushed open the bedroom door. At first I saw no one there, but a tall, dark gentleman, who looked up as I entered, and stared at me—stared so hard that I remembered I had bare feet and only my cotton dressing-gown on, and blushed for fear that the knowledge had struck him also. But in another moment my thoughts had flown back to my mother, and my eyes turned to the bed. There she lay, pale and pretty, much as I had seen her last, but in a position which made me think that she had swooned.

"'Sir! sir!' I hastily exclaimed, 'do you

not see that my mamma has fainted ?' and I ran up to the bedside, knelt down there, and taking her hand, slapped it gently as I had been taught to do on similar occasions. Yet the strange gentleman, to my astonishment, stood quite passive, and made no effort to assist me in restoring her.

“ ‘Fetch water, if you please, sir, or eau-de-cologne, or anything that will do her good,’ I pleaded, looking up into his face, and then for the first time I saw how good and kind a face it was. Still he said nothing, but gazed at me so sadly and compassionately, that the truth seemed suddenly to burst upon me ; and rising quickly from my knees, I dropped my mother’s hand, and seized hold of his.

“ ‘Tell me ! tell me !’ was all that I could utter, but he comprehended the entreaty.

“ ‘She will suffer no more,’ he answered,

quietly, and rough and unlearned as I was, I knew by intuition that he meant that my mother was dead.

“The shock came upon me as though I had been ordered to prepare for instant death myself; and dropping down again upon my knees by the bedside, I buried my face in my hands, and burst into a long fit of weeping, over which I seemed to have no control.

“My mother gone—gone—dead—to be taken away from me—to be buried in the churchyard—never to see her or hear her again; I could not believe it—I could not realise it; but if I stayed my sobbing for one moment to collect my senses, the bitter truth again forced itself on me; and I burst forth afresh.

“The strange gentleman was very patient with me; very patient and very tender. At this day I can appreciate his

patience and tenderness far better than I could then.

“ ‘Why was I not sent for?’ I wailed, between my tears; ‘you should have let me know how ill she was. I am her child; it was cruel, it was unkind to forget me so.’

“I felt his hand laid gently on my head.

“ ‘If she had expressed a wish to see you,’ he answered, quietly, ‘you should have been sent for, but before she could do so, she became unconscious, and remained in the same state until the end. It could only have given you more pain to see her suffering.’

“At this remark I commenced to weep anew; but I wept the more quietly for feeling that he still kept his hand upon my head. At last I was exhausted; the fountain of my tears seemed dried up, and with swollen eyes and throbbing temples I lay my head down upon the counterpane. I

had heard other voices in the room beside my own, during this period—the voice of Mrs. Mitchell, crying in sympathy with me, and demanding if I wouldn't take a cup of tea or something ; and the voice of Mr. Burrell urging me to bear up, and be a good girl, as my mother would have desired to see me ; but I paid no attention to either of them ; and the strange gentleman had hushed them down and urged them to leave me to myself.

“ But when I felt that I was thoroughly worn out, and for the moment could cry no more, he put his strong arms round me and lifted me from the ground, as if I had been a baby, and I offered no resistance.

“ ‘Where are you taking me?’ I whispered, as he carried me away.

“ ‘To your own bed!’ was his reply, and although I did not wish to go there, I made no objection, but passively laid

my head upon his shoulder, and suffered him to do as he thought fit.

“He placed me on my bed, and mixed a draught for me, and made me drink it, and though I thought my eyes could never close again, in a few minutes I fell asleep, and did not wake until the morning. Then all the misery came back in fullest force, and was aggravated by the news that the strange gentleman was some relation of my dead mother’s, and that I was to leave Saltpool with him that very day. It seemed so cruel to tear me away from her while still she lay upon her bed.

“Yet I was too much of a child to make any resistance against lawful authority, and so Mrs. Mitchell packed my scanty wardrobe in a box, and after an agonised parting with my poor mother’s body, and a more subdued one with my humble

friends, I was lifted into the fly which took us to the railway station. Then came a long journey, during which, though the strange gentleman scarcely spoke except to ask if I were comfortable, I seemed to cling to him as the only creature left to care about me ; and at length we arrived at a large bustling town, and dizzy and bewildered with grief, I found myself driving with him through the streets.

“The carriage stopped at the door of what appeared a most beautiful house to me, and for a few minutes I was left quite alone, whilst he went in to speak to some one. Then he reappeared and, helping me to alight, hurried me through the hall into a room where a lady, with evident surprise in her looks, waited to receive us. She was not a nice-looking lady ; she gave a hard sort of smile as she shook hands with me, but I saw that the smile was forced,

and I turned from her to cling to the gentleman who had brought me there.

“ ‘Petronel,’ he said, ‘this is my sister, and your cousin. I must leave you under her charge for a few hours, but I shall soon return. Marcia, see that she has everything that she can possibly require.’

“The lady promised, though not in a very cordial manner.

“ ‘Really, Ulick,’ she exclaimed, ‘to hear you speak, one would think I had never received a guest in the house before!’ But he took no notice of the sneer.

“ ‘I shall pay a few visits that are absolutely necessary,’ he said, ‘and then go straight to Frampton. Should I be very late, she may have to sleep here.’

“The lady elevated her eyebrows, but he took no notice of that either. He was going away then, when he looked round and saw my weary, tearful face wistfully

regarding him. He stopped short, retraced his steps, and took my cold, gloveless little hand in his.

“ ‘I will not be longer than I possibly can help,’ he said, kindly. ‘You will be a good girl and wait patiently till my return.’

“ ‘Yes, yes, I will,’ I answered ; but I still retained his hand, as though loath to part with him. I suppose the action reminded him that I was very friendless, for he stooped down and kissed me on the forehead.

“ Then I began to cry afresh, remembering my mother’s kisses, and, by the time I had recovered myself, he was gone, and I was alone with the lady whom he called Marcia, and who sat on the opposite side of the room without saying a word, but staring at me all the while with her hard, black eyes. How I disliked her, even at first sight !

“And that strange gentleman was cousin Ulick—though I had not thought to ask his name, nor cared to inquire what relationship he bore to me.”

CHAPTER VI.

HOW DR. FORD'S BENEVOLENCE WAS REWARDED.

DR. FORD did not bestow more time upon his patients that morning than he could absolutely avoid. It was noon before he reached Rockborough ; and, having changed his clothes and taken some refreshment, he held an interview with Mr. Austin and a gentleman of the name of Elliot, who had undertaken part of his day's practice for him, saw two or three cases that were urgent, attended a consultation, visited a hospital, and then, finding it was close upon four o'clock, threw himself into his brougham, and gave the order

to drive to Frampton. The estate of Sir Lionel Halsted was distant about five miles from Rockborough, and the road lay chiefly through the preserves of landed gentry ; so that, once clear of the town, there was nothing to distract Ulick Ford's mind from reverting, with painful distinctness, to the event of the day before. And yet, although he made no effort to repel the thought, and the deepest lines which Time and Care had engraven on his face appeared as he delivered himself up to it, he did not seem much more sad or grave than he had done for the last fourteen years ; and it is questionable if he felt so. He had lost his cousin then, and he had never regained her, nor wished to do it ; for, such was his disposition, that, having been once deceived in her, could she have been freed twice over from the bonds for which she had voluntarily broken her faith to him, Ulick Ford

would not have made Cecilia Fleming his wife. She had caused him years of suffering by destroying his belief in the worth of woman, and shaking his trust in the goodness of God ; but she had never succeeded in making him seriously wish that that time of deception could come over again, or that he could take her as she was and make her part of his own life. Therefore, the mere fact of her death could make no material difference to him, although seeing her again, after such an interval of pain, and in so pitiable a condition as to command the sympathy of any man, had, for the moment, greatly excited his feelings respecting her, and opened his old wounds afresh. But she was gone. At last there was an end to it, and he knew that he must return to his "work and labour until the evening"—the evening which cures all things, which soothes our pain and bids a

sweet eternal rest descend upon our bodies, wearied with fighting the battle of life and sin — and that the memory of the love he had been compelled to resign would intrude upon his duty, no more and no less than it had done before. And so, as he leaned back in his carriage, unoccupied with either book or paper, his thoughts dwelt more upon the interview in store for him than that which he had lately passed through. It was not a pleasant task which he had undertaken. His uncle's family and he were excellent friends, and he could hardly believe that Sir Lionel would refuse to befriend his own grandchild. At the same time, he had never approached the subject of Cecilia with either of her parents since the day on which she had left them, and he was aware that the news he carried respecting Petronel was not likely news to ensure his welcome. But the same nerve

which had made him what he was, prevented his shrinking from any scene, however disagreeable. And as he found himself driving rapidly through the park of Frampton, he did not even take the trouble to wish it were well over.

Frampton Hall, as the house itself was called, was one of the show places of the county, and strangers travelling by that line of railway seldom failed to ask their fellow-passengers if they could tell them the name of the handsome white building, which, situated on a gentle rise, stood out so well against its own grand background of dark trees. It was built in the Italian style, being low and long, with porticos ajutting from the principal windows, and a conservatory at either end. The property on which it stood was of great value, and the eldest son, Major Wilfred Halsted, of the 100th Hussars, was considered an

admirable *parti* by most of the mothers of Belgravia.

The younger son, Archibald, was in the law, and though by far the steadier character of the two, was the least good-natured. Lady Otho Vivian had mentioned that both her brothers were staying at Frampton, and Ulick Ford, in thinking the matter over, hoped that Wilfred might be present at the coming interview; to join him, if necessary, in pleading the cause of his friendless little niece. In which respect his wishes were gratified, as, on entering the library of Frampton Hall, he found the whole family party there assembled. Sir Lionel, a delicate-featured old man, who bore too strong a resemblance to his two pretty daughters to be called handsome, was dozing in the arm-chair before a blazing fire, whilst Lady Halsted, a little, round, roly-poly woman, with dark

eyes and pink cheeks, and snow-white hair, was sitting by his side, engaged upon some knitting—destined for a counterpane—about which Ulick Ford had seen her busy ever since he could remember.

At a table near, sat Miss Halsted, writing letters; the only Miss Halsted left upon the tree—a younger edition of her mother; whilst Major Wilfred, sheltered by the *Times*, lounged upon a sofa; and Archibald was reading at the further end of the room. They all rose, or spoke, as evidence of welcome when Ulick Ford broke in upon them; for “our cousin, the doctor,” notwithstanding the “lowness” of his occupation, and his birth, was a general favourite with the Halsteds; for his own sake, as well as theirs.

He greeted them familiarly in his turn, although they noticed that in doing so his air was somewhat hurried.

“Well, Ford,” said Sir Lionel, as he shook off his drowsiness, and sat more upright, “and what is the news with you to-day? Did you come of your own accord, or were you sent for?”

“I was not sent for,” replied Ulick Ford, as he drew a chair beside him; “I came of my own accord. I am the bearer of distressing news to you, Sir Lionel.”

“Eh! aye!” exclaimed the old man, turning about to face his nephew, “how is that? Julia not ill, I hope. She was here the day before yesterday.”

“My errand has nothing to do with Lady Otho; it relates to your other daughter, Mrs. Fleming.”

“Then I have no wish to hear it,” replied the father, as, frowning visibly, he turned away his head again; but Ulick Ford went steadily on.

“I received a telegram late last night,

requesting my presence at Saltpool, and I went at once and spent several hours there."

"No details, if you please; no details," said Sir Lionel, waving off the coming communication with his hand.

"I found Mrs. Fleming dangerously ill," continued Ulick Ford, "and I left her—dead!"

In hopes of making some impression on his implacable hearer, he had purposely been abrupt in communicating the intelligence of his daughter's death to him; and at first the effect seemed to be all that he could desire.

Sir Lionel, opening his eyes to their widest extent, stared at him fixedly as though to read the truth in his countenance, and then fell back in his arm-chair with a feeble exclamation of horror. Lady Halsted, after a cry of incredulous distress,

produced her pocket-handkerchief, and relapsed into a fit of childish sobbing, in which she was joined by her [daughter : the Major exclaimed, "By Jove!" threw down his newspaper, and took his legs off the sofa : and Archibald, casting aside his book, and advancing into the family circle, seemed to wait for further particulars of his sister's death.

"*Dead!*" repeated Sir Lionel, half to himself, "*dead!* It appears impossible! Poor girl! poor girl!"

"Oh, my dear Cissy!" sobbed the mother; "it seems but like the other day that she was here,—so happy and so innocent! Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

"Where is that d—d scoundrel, Fleming?" demanded the Major, in a low voice, as he pulled his moustaches.

"You saw, doubtless, that she had all that she required?" interposed the voice of

Archibald Halsted, and his remark afforded his cousin the opportunity for which he was waiting.

"Unfortunately," he replied, "I was sent for only in time to see her die. She breathed her last about an hour after my arrival. She had evidently been living in straitened circumstances, but I observed no evidences that the necessities of life had been wanting to her condition."

"Was *he* there?" demanded Sir Lionel, with set teeth.

"He was not, nor as far as I could ascertain has he ever been seen at Saltpool. I found Mrs. Fleming under the charge of a medical man of the name of Burrell, who laboured under the impression that she was a widow. I had a long conversation with him respecting her, and he told me that she had been in ill-health for several years past."

"How did she live?" asked the Major, curiously.

"How do I know?" was the reply, not conveyed without a sinister reproach and heightened colour. "*I* was not the person to look after her. I have put a seal upon her desk and drawers, and when you go down to her funeral (as I conclude you will do), you will learn all that their contents can tell you."

"It is *his* fault," muttered Sir Lionel. "It is all the fault of that low-born, rascally scoundrel who came and stole my child from me, that she lies as she does to-day. What woman of her birth and station could survive the disgrace of being linked with the fortunes of a drawing-master? It was enough to kill her."

"Her lungs were affected," said the doctor, dryly. "She would have died under any circumstances. Though that her

life might have been made more happy, I do not deny."

"Oh! you don't mean to say, Ulick," exclaimed Lady Halsted, "that we could have visited her, poor dear, after the way in which she had disgraced herself? It was impossible. Think what he was, only a drawing-master, at seven-and-sixpence the lesson; and I'm sure when I engaged him for the girls, little did I think that I was bringing down ruin and devastation upon all our heads. And so pretty as she was, too, and so admired! Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

"Come, come! Let's have no more of this," interposed Sir Lionel. "I am much obliged to you, Ford, for what you have done for our poor girl, and I wish we had known of her illness earlier. However, as you say it was not to be avoided, we must bear it as best we may, and try to forget

that we ever hoped otherwise for her." Here the old man's voice faltered, and he stopped a moment to recover himself. "When did you say the funeral was to be—next Thursday? Well, I don't know whether I shall be able to attend it myself, but Wilfred and Archibald will, of course, and I shall take it as a favour, Ford, if you will accompany them."

"I always intended to do so, Sir Lionel."

"And will you see that arrangements are made for its being properly conducted? conducted as it should be for *my daughter*: and—and—don't let us 'talk any more about it at present, Ford, for I don't mind confessing that the news has somewhat upset me—somewhat upset me;" and here Sir Lionel retreated behind his silk bandana, and Lady and Miss Halsted burst forth afresh.

But Ulick Ford could not leave without

delivering Cissy's last message to her father, and he thought no opening could be more favourable than the present.

"I am sorry to distress you further, Sir Lionel; but my duty compels me to say a few more words to you. When I first saw your daughter she was sensible, and she committed a message for you to my charge."

"Go on!"

"She said, 'Take my child to Frampton—to my father—tell him he must receive her—she has no one else.'"

Dr. Ford repeated these words slowly, pausing between each sentence, to note what effect it had upon his aunt and uncle; but when he had concluded, there was on all sides a dead silence.

"Did you undertake to do as she desired you?" demanded Sir Lionel, after a long pause.

"I did. I had no choice but to do so,

else the poor child would have been left alone. I brought her home to Rockborough with me this morning, and she is now at my house. A fine, healthy, handsome girl, of whom any family might be proud."

"Proud! *proud!*" exclaimed Sir Lionel, all the softened demeanour which he had exhibited at the intelligence of his daughter's death, vanishing as if by magic, to be replaced by a kindling eye and heightened colour. "Do you mean to tell me, Ford, that the Halsteds could be proud of a Fleming? do you forget what that child is—whose blood runs in her veins? No, there are few requests that my daughter might not have asked me on her death-bed, and had granted to her; but I will never consent to receive David Fleming's child beneath my roof, nor to acknowledge her as my grandchild. I should have shrunk from

it had the man himself been dead ; but living, and liable to claim his own at any time, it becomes impossible to me. I will not hear of it."

"I hinted at that contingency to Mrs. Fleming," said Ulick Ford, "and her reply was that her husband had gone away—was dead for aught she knew to the contrary, and would never trouble you."

"Who can be sure of that?" responded the old man, hotly ; "besides, were it so, have we not suffered enough for the last fourteen years, in the mere knowledge of the fact, that we are now asked to keep his very flesh and blood beneath our eyes, to torture us each time they fall upon it? I will not hear of it. My daughter was my own, but her child is a Fleming, and I utterly renounce it, from this day henceforward and for ever"—and exhausted with the argument, and trembling with

excitement, Sir Lionel again relapsed into silence.

Then Ulick Ford turned to the other members of the family to learn what they had to say upon the subject.

"I think Sir Lionel is right," plaintively advanced Lady Halsted. "You see, Ulick, if our poor dear Cissy were still living, it would be *so* different; but since she is gone," with a succession of sniffs, "it would seem strange after the firmness we have considered it our duty to maintain for so many years, that we should consent to receive Mr. Fleming's child, which would of course be a precedent for receiving himself, whenever he chose to make his appearance."

"And what *should* we do with a great girl running about the house?" said Miss Halsted.

"Seems doosid hard on the child," remarked the Major, thoughtfully; "but I

quite agree with the governor, Ford, that to acknowledge her claims on the family might prove very inconvenient to us. Of course we can never have any communication with the father again, and there is no knowing to what lengths such a cur might not go, in order to annoy us through the child. We can't take her up one day and disown her the next, you see."

"Perhaps we shall discover Fleming's address from my sister's papers," said Archibald Halsted; "but if not, the man, if alive, can be reached through the medium of an advertisement, and I think after all that will be the best plan, Ford. We'll communicate with him by that means, and he can write where he wishes the child sent to. He cannot possibly shift the burthen of supporting her on to our shoulders."

"And meanwhile she may starve," said Ulick Ford. In the largeness of his own

heart he sat wonderstruck at the narrowness of his relations' feelings, whose brief emotion at hearing of poor Cissy's untimely death had been all swallowed up by their fear of being expected to acknowledge the child which she had left behind her.

"There is the workhouse!" said Sir Lionel, sternly, "and the fittest place for the daughter of a pauper."

"And your grandchild, Sir Lionel!"

"She is not my grandchild, Ford! I utterly deny it. I have never thought of her as such, nor shall I ever do so."

"Very well," replied his nephew, quietly rising from his seat, "if that is your final decision I have no argument wherewith to gainsay it, so I need spend no more time here. The girl will not be neglected, you may rest assured of that, for I promised her mother that if you would not receive her, I would do so."

“Do you intend to keep her in your house at Rockborough?” demanded Lady Halsted, with surprise.

“With respect to that I have had no time to decide; but I intend to do as I have promised, and the future will right itself.”

“You’re a doosid good fellow, Ford,” said the Major, warmly; and then he crossed the hearthrug and whispered a few words in his father’s ear, whilst Ulick was saying good-bye to his aunt and cousins.

“Ford!” exclaimed Sir Lionel, as he was about to leave the room; “come back here for a minute, Ford, will you? I want to speak to you:” and as the doctor retraced his steps, he continued, “You know, that though it would be altogether against my principles, and against my notions of what is right,” (through what strange tinted glasses do people not view their own selfish

actions!) "to receive the little girl at Frampton, and let all the world hear a daughter of that rascal Fleming calling me grandfather, I don't want—I shouldn't like to think, you know, that you were being put to any outlay on her account; and therefore, if she remains unclaimed, and your sister will be good enough to fit her out with decent mourning and so forth, and place her at a respectable school, *I* will be answerable for her expenses, until something further is settled about her. But remember," with an uplifted hand, "that I never wish to hear any particulars relating to the child; draw on me for what amount you think fit, and, since by your own account you have undertaken the charge in case of my refusing it, lay it out as may be required for her; but, if possible, don't let me hear her name."

"Well! I don't think the governor could

make a fairer proposal than that, Ford," said the Major, admiringly.

Ulick Ford bit his lip. He had listened patiently to the proposal of Sir Lionel, but it had grated terribly against his feelings. If there was one point above another upon which he was peculiarly sensitive, it was the subject of money; and it was greatly to his credit that when his answer came, it was delivered without the least appearance of pique or annoyance.

"If I should require your assistance," he said quietly, "I will not fail to ask it, but you know, Sir Lionel, that I have very little to do with my money, and — in fine, if I accept this charge at all it must be single-handed; without either help or interference."

"Very well, very well," replied his uncle, "have your own way, but, remember, I offered it, and don't let this affair make

any difference between you and me, Ford ; your presence at Frampton is too valuable to be easily dispensed with. Ah ! I wish I could have foreseen things a little, fourteen years ago. So the funeral is to be on Thursday, at three ; we shall not forget. Poor Cissy ! poor thing ! Who would have thought it ?" And with that the doctor was allowed to bow himself away, and return to Rockborough ; whilst his relations, according to their several lights, commented on his extraordinary philanthropy with respect to "poor Cissy's" child.

As for Ulick Ford himself, he hardly knew what to think. He had not believed it possible that Sir Lionel could so openly and determinately refuse to have anything to do with his own grandchild ; and yet, here was he, returning to Rockborough with Petronel Fleming, to all appearance, thrown on his protection for life, (for that

her worthless father would ever take the trouble to reclaim her was at the least improbable) ; and, notwithstanding the promise he had made his dying cousin, he felt very much as though the "blushing honours" of guardianship had been thrust upon him. Yet he neither repented the promise, nor shirked the responsibility, though he foresaw that in the future it might prove a source of serious trouble.

The sight of Cecilia Fleming's daughter was a pain to him, but it would have been a greater pain to see her cast forth upon the tender mercies of the world. As to what that world, (so fond of meddling with its neighbours' concerns,) would say to his adoption of her, Ulick Ford thought nothing and cared less : his was too great a nature to mind, when doing what he knew was right, how other people viewed the action. But, for the child's sake (not his own) he

was anxious to hear what Marcia said upon the subject ; and, consequently, as soon as he reached home, he sent word that he desired to speak with her alone ; and she came to him in his consulting-room.

“ How is the child ? ” he said abruptly, as she entered.

“ *Child !* ” retorted Miss Marcia. “ If you mean that girl of Cecilia Fleming’s, Ulick, I don’t know whom you will call a child next : why, she is nearly as tall as I am.” And indeed, in bulk and stature the young cousin had almost the advantage.

“ How is Petronel, then ? ”

“ Oh ! well enough, as far as I can see. I wonder, by the way, who on earth chose that outlandish name for her ; I am sure it never came from the Halsted side of the family. She was rather silent and sulky after you left us, and so I gave her some

books to look at, and sent up her dinner to the breakfast-room ; and I see she has fallen asleep on the sofa there. You saw Sir Lionel and Aunt Mary ?”

He took no notice of her question, but feigned to be arranging his papers.

“Poor child ! she must be quite worn out with fretting and fatigue. You had better get her to bed at once, Marcia !”

Miss Ford turned sharply round.

“Is she to sleep here, then ? I cannot see the necessity. Surely there is sufficient time for her to reach Frampton, to-night.”

“Perhaps so ; but she is not going there at all. Sir Lionel refuses to receive, or even to acknowledge her !”

“Ulick !”

“You may well feel surprised at the announcement. I hardly thought myself that anyone could show so little feeling in

the matter, but it is the case, and there's an end of it!"

"And what is to be done with the girl, then, after to-night I mean?"

"She will remain here; unless her father comes forward to re-claim her, which is unlikely."

"Remain *here*! ~~HERE~~—*live* here—with you and myself!"

It is out of the power of italics or capitals to convey one tithe of the astonishment, horror, and dismay which thrilled through Miss Ford's broken words.

"Yes!—here with you and myself. I promised her dying mother that, in case of her grandfather refusing to receive her, it should be so."

"But if *they* refuse, why should *we* be burdened? What claim has the girl on us—on *you*?"

Miss Marcia would have added more in

the same strain, had not her brother raised his eyes and looked at her. She knew that look of old : the firmness which brooked no gainsaying, the decision which forbid all argument, and before it she shrunk into herself, and offered no further opposition to his wishes.

“Where is she to sleep ?” she demanded humbly.

“Oh ! anywhere !” was the careless answer. “Have you not a spare bedroom to put the child in ?”

“The best bedroom !” she echoed aghast.

“Yes ! if you like it ; it signifies but little so you make her comfortable. And one word more, Marcia : you will be getting your own mourning shortly, I presume. See that the child is properly equipped from head to foot. I wish no expense to be spared about her clothes.”

“Am I to get black silk and crape, then, for a girl of that age?”

“I know nothing of your terms for millinery,” he answered; “but if that is the proper thing, she is to wear it. And now, Marcia, send up your maid to attend to her, and let us have our dinner. I have heard enough of this subject for to-day.” And with a heavy sigh he walked upstairs into his dressing-room.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORY OF PETRONEL.

“I CANNOT remember, at this distance of time, how or when it happened, I first received the information that I was to stay with Cousin Ulick and his sister ; but I know that the news, when it came, was very pleasant news to me. I had heard rumours of a place called Frampton, where my mother used to live, and I was afraid they were going to send me away to the care of some grand relations, who would not love me, and of whom I should feel terribly afraid ; not that cousin Marcia loved me, far from it, but her manner, though stiff, did not alarm me, for I was

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from my former habits of boisterous mirth ; but I am speaking of the first week, when my spirits were subdued, and I felt strange and shy in my new position. When I had become familiar with the place and people, I returned to my old self. On the evening of my mother's funeral, the message was that ' Miss Ford ' was ready to receive me ; and when I descended to the dining-room, I found Cousin Marcia, also robed in a black dress, sitting there alone. The fact that she was wearing it for the same memory as myself, seemed to draw me closer to her, and she, for her part, appeared more cordial than before ; but when her brother entered her manner altogether changed. He came in hastily, throwing his hat, which had a deep crape band upon it, on the sideboard, and swallowing the dinner which had been kept back for him, in utter silence. I did not like to thank him for going to Saltpool to see my

mother buried, although I knew that he had been there, but, unoccupied with book or work, I drew my chair as near his as I dared, and kept my eyes fixed upon his face, as if in expectation of his speaking to me. Once he looked up suddenly, and caught me thus, and from the haste with which he turned away I feared I had displeased him; but the next moment he raised his head again, and saying—‘ Well, little woman ! can’t you find a book to interest you to-night ? ’ — patted me on the shoulder. I rose to get one off the side-table, and as I did so I heard his sister say eagerly, though in a low voice :—

“ ‘ Were the papers examined to-day ? ’

“ ‘ Yes ! ’ was the curt answer.

“ ‘ And no information gained—no address—nothing ? ’

“ ‘ Nothing ! ’

“ ‘How *very* strange—quite unaccountable. You will advertise, won’t you?’

“ ‘I do not know. Say no more on the subject at present, please!’

“ ‘I knew they were speaking of me, or of something which concerned me, and that their minds were not one upon the matter: but as I brought my book to the table, she was silent and he resumed his dinner. I felt curious to learn the reason.

“ ‘Am I going away?’ I asked, timidly, as I pulled his coat sleeve.

“ ‘He looked up, oh! so kindly at me.

“ ‘No! my child!’ he said. ‘You are to remain here.’

“ ‘I am so glad!’ I answered fervently. And then his eyes wandered for a moment over my black frock, and he said no more.

“ ‘It was then that Cousin Marcia’s manner seemed to change, and she bounced

about and spoke so sharply to me, that I began to wonder what I had done wrong.

“ ‘Come, Petronel,’ she exclaimed, as the clock struck nine, and Pinner appeared at the door, ‘it is your bed-time. Don’t keep the servant waiting.’ And she was about to bundle me out of the room before I had spoken to her brother.

“ ‘Let me say good-night to—to *him*,’ I pleaded ; for I had not yet been told how I was expected to address him.

“ ‘Pray, Ulick, by what name do you intend Petronel to call you?’ she demanded, as he gravely kissed my forehead. ‘She can hardly go about the place speaking of “the gentleman,” and “him!”’

“He did not answer her, but seemed as though considering what title would be best for me to use.

“ ‘Perhaps you would like her to call

you "papa,"" continued Cousin Marcia, with a bitterness in her tone for which, whilst recognising, I was unable to account ; 'it is the custom, I believe, with adopted children.'

"Even then he did not answer, although I waited breathlessly for his reply, for he seemed so good, I thought I should much like to call him 'father,' but he raised his eyes and looked at his sister, and I saw that she grew very red.

" 'Do you know what relation I am to you, Petronel ?' he said, after a moment's pause, as I still stood by his side.

" 'Cousin, are you not ? you were cousin to my poor mamma !' and at the recollection my eyes overflowed.

" 'Yes !—I was her cousin, and I am yours—although I am so much older than you are. You can call me no better name than Cousin Ulick !'

“ ‘Used mamma to call you so, Cousin Ulick ?’

“ ‘Yes—sometimes—I believe so—there, child, that will do. Good-night !’ And he dismissed me to the care of Pinner.

“ After that day my spirits began gradually to revive, and though it was some time before I became as noisy and as troublesome as of old, I had not been at Rockborough a month before I had contrived to get into several scrapes. I was left too much to myself at that period, and the confined life, so different to the free unshackled existence I had led hitherto, fretted and galled me, so that I did mischief for lack of excitement. Cousin Marcia did not understand the requirements of so restless a creature as myself, or she would have found me employment to keep me out of temptation ; but, as I have said before, I had very little idea of amusing myself intellectually, and

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other amusements in that house there were none. Every morning that was fine, I was led out for a walk by Pinner the maid, whom I used to persuade to take me into the town to see all the pretty things in the shop windows ; but such well-regulated excursions were necessarily short, and for the remainder of the day I was left to myself. At first I derived great interest from examining the house, which was replete with paintings, and figures in bronze and china, and all sorts of curious articles ; and I shall never forget one day, when I was standing before a beautiful landscape which hung in the drawing-room, watching how the real sun, shining through the windows, lit up the water ripples in the picture, and made them look like life, and Cousin Ulick came in unawares and caught me there,—how pleased he seemed to be ; for a minute, that is to say, for when encouraged by his smile

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I began to tell him how fond I was of pictures, and how sometimes I lay down with closed eyes and traced out new ones for myself, a kind of cloud came over him, and greatly to my disappointment, he went downstairs again.

“But the drawing-room, although full of treasures, was not inexhaustible, and another day, when Cousin Marcia had gone out visiting, and Wheeler, with a solemn face, had twice appeared from the lower regions with a caution that if I slid any more up and down the banisters, he should inform against me, I wandered listlessly about the house until I found my way into a new apartment, even to my Cousin Ulick’s consulting-room. Now, although I had never been strictly forbidden to enter it, I knew that room was held as something sacred by the other members of the household, that the door was usually kept locked,

that no one but Wheeler was allowed to clean or dust it, and that Cousin Marcia never set her foot within its precincts unless her brother specially invited her to do so. But all this caution only served to make the inspection of it more seductive to me, for I argued that if the place demanded so much care, it must contain things of the greatest value, and the few glimpses I had obtained through the half-opened door had made me feel most anxious to see further. And so, on this particular occasion, the portal being left ajar, and Wheeler and the other servants quiet below stairs, I pushed it boldly open, and entered Bluebeard's chamber. At first I was a little disappointed; the mystery seemed no mystery after all, and I only saw a moderately-sized room, furnished with modern oak and leather. At one end was a long large sofa, and I wondered whether patients were ever

tied down upon it, whilst Cousin Ulick sawed off their legs and arms ; and if so, what he did with all the blood, to say nothing of the severed members, and if Wheeler came in and helped to hold them, and how they ever managed to get home afterwards. And then there was a big arm-chair, that doubtless was where they sat to have their teeth drawn. (How horrified my cousin would have been at the mere supposition ! but my notions at that time of the duties of the medical profession were but vague.) Poor creatures ! how I pitied them, I, who had never been sick in all my life, and how much I marvelled that both chairs and sofa looked so clean and innocent of the dreadful slaughters committed on them. And yet my exaggerated ideas had no power to shake my faith in my Cousin Ulick ; on the contrary, I admired him greatly for being so clever as

to be able to do such grand things ; and I felt quite sure he was too kind to hurt anybody more than he could possibly help, and that if he put them to pain, another doctor, Mr. Austin, whom I had sometimes met, for instance, would put them to much worse. So I left inspection of the chair and sofa, and turned my attention to the writing-table, which was a handsome, massive piece of furniture, laden with articles in bronze and ivory, and strewn with paper, both written on and plain. There were books, too, in the consulting-room, some of which lay on an oaken shelf, and others were scattered carelessly about the table, and having seized on one of the latter, I was soon absorbed in its contents. I had never seen so strange a book before, nor yet such curious pictures, and I laughed aloud as I turned over the coloured prints which it contained, and puzzled my igno-

rant little head to find out what they were intended to represent. But the letter-press was horribly difficult to me, full of long hard words, and many of them in a language of which I did not even know the name; and so I cast the book aside, and having covered a dozen sheets of writing-paper with pen and ink sketches of everyone in the house, took up three small bottles which stood upon the table. White glass bottles they were, sealed at the top, and full of water, in which were floating indescribably funny things. Pickles of some sort, I concluded, but thought it strange at the same time that my cousin should keep pickles for his private consumption in the consulting-room; but perhaps he sometimes had his luncheon there, which made it seem natural enough. Pickles were not sufficiently interesting for me, however, and I had caught sight of

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something which promised to be so—an open drawer, lined with velvet, and filled with the prettiest things possible, all bright and shining, and each lying in its own particular little place. I pulled the drawer right out, and examined them with eagerness ; I had never met with such a collection before. There were long thin scissors, which looked as though they had been nearly starved to death, and short fat scissors, that seemed as though they had been cut in two, and scissors that shrugged their shoulders ; and others again, all curly-wurly, which reminded me of nothing but a corkscrew. And then there were knitting-pins of every shape and size, and rolls of silk and wire, and tiny saws, and long sharp knives, and things like gimlets, until I felt bewildered at the number of them, and was undecided whether Cousin Ulick employed his leisure in sewing like a lady, or

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until I was recalled to it by the sudden opening of the door, and the voice of my cousin Ulick exclaiming with astonishment, ‘Petronel!’ as though he scarcely could believe his senses.

“ ‘Petronel? Petronel in *your room*, Ulick!’ sounded in the sharp incredulous tones of his sister; and then I looked up, and saw them both regarding me. I coloured violently, for if I had not been previously aware that I was doing wrong, the accent they spoke in would have told me so; and in another moment my cousin Marcia, who, owing to the emergency of the occasion, had ventured to advance over the threshold, left me in no doubt of my transgression.

“ ‘Petronel!’ she exclaimed again, ‘is it possible you have dared to come into this room? Don’t you know that *no one* is allowed to do so, without leave; that even *I* am obliged to ask your cousin Ulick be-

fore I enter here? And—good heavens! Ulick,’ she continued, as she espied my occupation, ‘see what the girl is about! She has actually touched your instruments, taken them out of the drawer—strewn them over the table!’

“‘I was playing at spellicans with them,’ I said, in explanation, as I gazed dubiously at my unfinished game.

“‘*At spellicans!* the instruments which it is as much as any servant’s place in this house is worth, even to touch—which cost pounds upon pounds—the girl must be simple. . And look at your paper, Ulick—scribbled from one end to the other; and all your books tossed about! Oh, you naughty, mischievous, disobedient girl, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!’

“‘I was never told not to touch them!’ I answered, doggedly, though I was very

sorry to think I might have offended Cousin Ulick, who all this time had said nothing, but stood at the fireplace with his back towards us.

“ ‘You ought to know it without being told,’ resumed Miss Marcia, vehemently, ‘you *must* have known it if you have any sense ; I don’t believe that—’

“ ‘Marcia !’ interrupted Cousin Ulick, without turning round, ‘that is enough ; let us hear no more upon the subject !’

“ ‘No more !’ she echoed with surprise. ‘Do you see what the girl has done, Ulick ? she has taken all your beautiful instruments out of the drawer.’

“ ‘Wheeler shall replace them.’

“ ‘She must have injured them by her rough treatment.’

“ ‘If so, it is not irreparable !’

“ ‘But she has drawn all over your writing paper.’

“ ‘There is plenty more where that came from.’

“He spoke so mildly that my courage returned, but his demeanour seemed to have a different effect on Cousin Marcia, who, after looking at him for a few minutes, without answering, burst into sudden tears, and rushed out of the room. Then I thought that I really must have committed a greater trespass than I had been aware of, and I crept up to Cousin Ulick’s side, and took one of his hands in mine.

“ ‘I am so sorry,’ I said in a low voice, ‘I didn’t know that it was wrong to come into this room; indeed I didn’t, Cousin Ulick!’

“ ‘You know it now, Petronel!’ he answered gravely, ‘and you must remember it in future. You have sadly disarranged my things, and it will take some time to

get them right again. This is not the place for little girls, or indeed for anyone except such people as I choose to bring. You will not forget again !

“ ‘And must I never come here, then ?’ I demanded sadly ; ‘not if I promise to be very quiet, and not to touch a single thing ?’

“ ‘Why should you wish to come, my child ?’ he answered.

“ ‘Only because you are here ; and I like to be with you and see you, Cousin Ulick. Do let me come—sometimes, just for a little while !’ I pleaded coaxingly, but he laughed at me, and unclasped my hand from his, and said, jestingly, that if ever I crossed the threshold again I should have a dose of medicine ; and then he bid me go up-stairs to Cousin Marcia, and do all that she desired me, like a good girl.

“ ‘But say you have forgiven me, first,’ I urged, still hanging to his arm, and raising my face to his.

“ ‘Yes! yes!’ he answered hurriedly, but he did not give the kiss I tacitly demanded, and I was disappointed at his non-compliance with my wish—I hardly knew why.

“ I found Cousin Marcia up-stairs, not yet entirely recovered of her tears, and complaining bitterly to Pinner that everything seemed changed for the worse since ‘that child’ had come into the house; but on perceiving me, she stopped, and proceeded to administer the rating which her brother had cut short below, and for which since he had pardoned my offence, I cared but little. But I was very particular after that circumstance, never to enter the consulting-room, though I often sat upon the mat outside, that I might get a word and a

pat on the head from Cousin Ulick, as he passed in or out.

“Spring was now well advanced; the blustering month of March had been succeeded by a soft warm April: even the town gave evidences, here and there, that Nature’s term of penance was completed, and I can hardly say how I panted to be allowed to race freely in the open air. I had been permitted to have so much license in this particular; my rambles with Betsy Mitchell (the loss of whose company I often deplored) and the village children of Saltpool had been so unlimited and unrestrained, that my decorous walks with Pinner, which lasted exactly one hour, and were usually taken in the same direction, were of as little use to me in the way of exercise as a canter round a gravel path to a young stag. I longed to break loose from her, and have a jolly run on the top of

the ramparts, or round the parade ground ; and she being as stiff and starched an old maid as her mistress, complaints of my want of steadiness when out walking became an almost daily occurrence.

“ One afternoon, however, the temptation to take a ramble by myself proved altogether too strong for me. It was a lovely, balmy day, towards the end of April, when all the fires in the house had died out without meeting the least opposition, and the windows which had been opened for duty had remained unclosed for pleasure. I had breathed the fresh air for my accustomed hour in the morning, and had plaintively entreated the virgin Pinner to give me a few minutes’ grace ; but, true to her orders, she had dragged me home again, and much against my will, derobed me of my walking things.

“ But luncheon being over, Cousin Marcia,

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in the opposite direction. Whether I mistook the landmarks, or was purposely misdirected, I know not; but after a while, the case, instead of bettering, began to look more serious. The streets were narrower and dirtier, and, in some instances, wet linen, which flapped against my head, was hung on lines across them. The women seemed to me half-clothed, and oaths and tipsy songs resounded on all sides. Presently a drunken sailor, roaring out some incoherent chorus, came rolling down the pavement, threatening to upset me, and at the same moment a gutter urchin, who had been watching his opportunity, pulled my long, loose hair with no gentle hand, whilst he sneeringly imitated my visible fear. I had been nervous before, but I was regularly frightened then, and, with a cry of alarm, I broke from the boy and ran quickly down the street. For how far or how long

I cannot say; but when, panting and breathless, I stopped from sheer necessity, glancing up in dread lest my little tormentor should have pursued me, I saw what appeared as a haven of safety—Cousin Ulick's carriage standing before the door of one of those low houses.

“There it was! Not to be mistaken, with its dark, glossy panels, its two beautiful horses, which I had so often longed to pat and caress, and its stolid, immoveable coachman, from whom I could never extract even a look of recognition when passing him during my morning strolls.

“I was too much frightened to feel fear at its appearance. My only sensation was one of ineffable relief; and, rushing up to it, without a word of explanation I opened the door and jumped quickly inside. As I had expected, it was empty: Cousin Ulick's carriage-basket, filled with papers and let-

ters, and Cousin Ulick's case-book and wooden trumpet (as I used to call his stethoscope) were all there; but he was in the house before which we stood, and in another minute would come back to find me seated in his place. Once safely housed and sure of reaching home again, this recollection made me feel uncomfortable; and it was with anxiously-expectant eyes, and very burning cheeks that I watched my cousin leave the house in question with two other gentlemen, and, having parted with them, turn the handle of the carriage-door.

“ ‘Petronel!’ he exclaimed in the same voice of surprise which he had used on catching me in the consulting-room, but with a deeper meaning in its tone.

“ ‘Oh, Cousin Ulick,’ I eagerly replied, ‘I didn’t mean to come so far: I was only going for a little walk, but I can’t find my way back again, and so——’

“ ‘*Home !*’ he ejaculated in a loud voice to the coachman ; and then he took a seat by my side and remained quite silent, as we quickly rolled through all those dirty streets again.

“ ‘Are you very angry with me, Cousin Ulick ?’ I said, presently, finding that he did not speak.

“ ‘Angry ? No ! But do you know where you have been ? You have been traversing the very lowest and worst quarter of the town—a place where no lady ever sets her foot—and it is quite by accident I happened to be here myself. Do you know what might have happened if I had not met you—but no ! how should you ? What was Pinner about to allow you to come out by yourself ?’

“ ‘I didn’t ask her,’ I replied, hanging my head ; ‘I always walked alone in Salt-pool ; and Cousin Marcia never takes me out, and Pinner is so stupid.’

“He did not answer me, but he sighed heavily, and looked out of the opposite window, whilst the carriage bore us swiftly towards home. I dared not speak again. I thought I really had offended him this time ; and when we stopped before the house and he led me into the presence of Cousin Marcia, I believe that I was trembling.

“ ‘Has Petronel been out with you, Ulick ?’ she exclaimed in a voice of displeasure, as we entered together. ‘And in that state, too ! Well, I think you might have told the servants or some one of your intention. We have had no end of trouble searching for her in one direction and the other. I am sure I thought the girl was lost !’

“ ‘And so she was, or might have been,’ he said. ‘I found her in Fish Alley—the most dangerous and demoralized quarter of Lower Rockborough, where she might have

been robbed or kidnapped, or injured in God only knows what manner. Is this the way that you look after your charge, Marcia ?

“ ‘It is not my fault,’ she answered ; ‘ she must have gone out by herself. Am I to blame if the girl is unruly and disobedient ?’

“ ‘We are both to blame,’ he said, sadly.

“ ‘Oh, no, Cousin Ulick !’ I exclaimed ; for my heart was penetrated with the idea of his accusing himself in the matter ; ‘ indeed, it is no one’s fault but my own. I knew I ought not to go out without Pinner, but it was such a lovely day, and I had nothing to do, and I did long for a run so !’

“ ‘Well, perhaps you will believe it now,’ sneered Miss Marcia. ‘You hear what the girl says herself—that she knew she was doing wrong, and yet she did it. It is not to be expected that I can control the actions of a young person of that age.’

“ ‘Why have you not provided her with occupation suitable to her age? I think I spoke to you upon the subject.’

“ ‘I did buy her both books and needle-work; but she can barely read or write, and has no idea of making herself useful.’

“ ‘At this accusation, so unfortunately well founded, I blushed scarlet. I was not ashamed of being detected in a fault, but I was terribly conscious of my educational deficiencies.

“ ‘Is that really the case?’ said Cousin Ulick, as he regarded me.

“ ‘But I’ve never been taught,’ I argued, bravely, although my breast was heaving, and the tears had forced themselves into my eyes. ‘I should have been very glad to learn if any one had taken the trouble to teach me.’

“ ‘Well, you *shall* learn, Petronel,’ he answered. ‘We have been altogether wrong

not to think of it before. I cannot stay now, Marcia, but we will speak again on the subject this evening. And now, child, dry your eyes ; I allow no tears in this house.'

"So said Cousin Ulick as he passed out of the room again and re-entered his carriage. As the hall-door slammed behind him I glanced timidly up at his sister, hoping that she might say something to show she was not angry with me. But the look which met mine was one of unmitigated dislike.

"'Go upstairs to Pinner,' she said, sharply ; 'there is nothing but wrangling and unpleasantness whenever your name is mentioned.' And then, as I slowly and, I must confess, somewhat saucily, obeyed her, I heard her mutter to herself—'I wish to goodness we had never seen her face ; we shall have all the old infatuation coming over again !'"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STORY OF PETRONEL—CONTINUED.

“**I** HEARD no more of my escapade from either Cousin Ulick or his sister, but the result of the cogitation which, I conclude, they held upon the subject was, that about a week afterwards I was called downstairs to be introduced to an extremely proper-looking lady, of the age of fifty, and the name of Penfold, to whose notice Cousin Marcia commended me in the following terms :

“ ‘ This is Miss Fleming, Miss Penfold. I am sorry to say that she has *everything* to learn, and it is therefore our wish that

she should make as good use of her time as possible. The distribution of it, of course, we leave to you ; but I trust you will not allow too much license in any way.'

"To which Miss Penfold, with a simpering smile—which did not seem at all natural to me—replied that she was sure her pupil and herself would become the most excellent of friends ; and that Miss Fleming would take too much interest in her new studies to desire any more recreation than was thought necessary by her indulgent guardians.

"Seeing my look of blank amazement, Cousin Marcia condescended to explain matters further to me.

"This is the lady, Petronel, whom your Cousin Ulick and myself have chosen to conduct your studies. She has kindly consented to come to us every day for that

purpose, from nine o'clock in the morning till five in the afternoon, during which hours you will be entirely under her control, and I trust will behave yourself in every respect as you should do.'

" 'Oh, no doubt of it ; no doubt of it ;' encouragingly murmured Miss Penfold.

"As for myself, the announcement took me quite by surprise. I had said that I was willing to learn, and had been honest in saying so ; but my ideas of learning were associated with running backwards and forwards to school twice a-day ; not of sitting for hours cramped up in Cousin Marcia's dull morning room, which looked out on the back-yard and the pump ; and of acquiring knowledge in company with a dozen bright faces like my own, instead of all by myself, beneath the rigid scrutiny of a Miss Penfold. I had heard of private governesses, but I had never seen one, and

as my eyes turned upon the future guardian of my mind and morals, my heart sunk.

“Miss Penfold was, as I have before observed, a lady of middle age, and, as after experience led me to believe, a woman of great accomplishments and experience, and doubtless my Cousin Ulick (so careful in his goodness of my rough self) had, in engaging her, received high references, and agreed to give an equally high salary ; yet she was not a woman to command a girl’s affections. Pinched and withered and soured by the monotony and dreariness of the life she was compelled to lead, the germs of interest which at one time and another she had doubtless put forth for the *dramatis personæ* that appeared before the shifting scenes of her existence, had been so often nipped and come to nothing, that she seemed afraid to

conceive more than a mere liking for any earthly thing.

“ She held within her every desideratum for causing the mind to unfold, but with the feelings of the heart she did not consider she had anything to do, and that it would be, in fact, intruding on her province to try and influence it; and therefore, whilst carrying a stereotyped smile and pleasant easy manner for all parties, she decidedly repressed anything like an ebullition of feeling on the part of her pupils. Perhaps it had been otherwise in days gone past, and Miss Penfold’s own heart had suffered for the temporary indulgence. However that may be, I was the sufferer now. A few days more saw me thoroughly established in the school-room with my governess, and though Miss Penfold’s propriety was evidently shocked at the woeful ignorance I displayed, she was too well

drilled to tell her thoughts to me, and we went on as easily as though I had been the most promising of pupils. But it was not my mind that most required culture ; my heart's blossoms were all running to seed for want of objects on which to expend their sympathies, and they attempted to strike root even in the sterile soil of Miss Penfold's affections.

“ I missed my mother terribly : more at this period than I had done at first, for as the time went on, I discovered, to my cost, that there was no one to replace her. From Cousin Marcia I seldom received a kind word, far less a caress ; sometimes I almost thought she hated me ; and of my Cousin Ulick I saw so little, and that only in his sister's presence, that I had no opportunity to unfold my heart to him ; so that I felt very much alone, and when I found that I must not even love Miss Pen-

fold—prim and proper as she was—my spirits sunk to zero. Not that she repulsed me by so many words, but if I ever attempted to make my studies appear lighter to me by pretending that they were a pleasure rather than a duty, she always recalled me by her manner to the fact. She would replace the hand which I had slipped into hers upon my lap with the reminder, lightly given, ‘Lessons now, my dear; we must think of nothing that will draw off our attention.’ And, once or twice when I ventured to lay my head—which ached with trying to understand arithmetic, or remember dates—upon her shoulder, she looked as horrified as though I had committed an impropriety.

“ ‘Miss Fleming, my dear; pray sit upright: we are at study, remember. I really cannot permit you to loll in that unlady-

like manner; you will quite spoil your figure by doing so."

"Whereupon I would be reinstated in the straight-backed chair which had been considered a necessary accompaniment to the governess, and the weary round of grammar and geography and history renewed.

"It is true that I had, as Cousin Marcia had remarked of me, everything to learn; but they might have been a little more merciful at the beginning. Rudiments are so exceedingly uninteresting, and I had been so unused to application, that the mere habit was a study in itself. But neither Miss Penfold nor my Cousin Marcia, who visibly interfered in every part of my education, seemed to think the fact worthy of consideration. I had no time to spare, and therefore every moment must be made use of, and with the exception of

my morning's walk (now taken with my governess instead of Pinner,—which was a change rather for the worse) and my early dinner, no intervals of recreation were permitted me. I was dragged from one class of study to another, until my head and fingers tired, my ignorant little brain was in a whirl, and notwithstanding my natural courage, my cheeks often stained with ineffectual tears.

“For sums which *won't* come right have a wonderful faculty for subduing the most rebellious spirits ; and to be turned three times in one's lesson, and have to unpick one's work twice, is sufficient to quell the buoyancy of a child who has no mother to go to for consolation. I know that it considerably quelled mine ; though when I thought myself unfairly treated, my old daring temper often gained the ascendancy over me, and was the cause of my getting

into many troubles. And then, when I could, as I imagined, get neither justice nor right feeling, from either Miss Penfold or my cousin, I used to fly to my bed-room and lock myself in, and call passionately on the name of my mother, and wish that I was lying with her in the churchyard at Saltpool.

“I am quite sure that my Cousin Ulick never knew anything of all this ; for it was a remarkable fact to me at the time, that however naughty she had been pleased to call me during the day, Cousin Marcia never prevented my being dressed to go down to the dining-room after dinner ; and on one occasion, when I had obstinately refused to do so, she came up herself and brushed my hair and coaxed me back into good humour. It never either struck me to make him acquainted with my troubles, for mine was a quick forgiving temper, and

by the time I met him the storm had usually passed over. Besides, when at home all the evening, which was very seldom, he was generally too silent and too tired to make even a selfish little creature like myself think of worrying him further. Added to which, old and grave as he appeared to me, I loved my Cousin Ulick dearly : and not being quite certain on which side his sympathies were enlisted, would have been afraid of bringing more reproof upon myself, which from his lips I should have found it twice as hard to bear, for he was the only one in my new home who had engaged my heart. I could not forget that he had stood by my dying mother's bed-side, and befriended me when I was worse than friendless ; and though he had never told me that he loved me, my instinct whispered that were it not so I should not be there, and I repaid the

notion with all the warmth of a very ardent nature. To see him, or to speak to him, was like a gleam of sunshine on my dullness : and in order to effect that purpose I did not care to what stratagem I had recourse. Sometimes I would rise very early, so as to meet him before he left home, or to stand by whilst he took his hurried breakfast, and as this was an occasion on which Cousin Marcia was never present it was usually a happy one ; and if, at any time during the day, my sharp ears caught the peculiar click which his pass-key made in opening the hall door, I would frame the first excuse which came into my head for leaving the apartment, and rush downstairs for a momentary greeting.

“ On one particular morning I was very restless, and very anxious to discern that sound which no one knew I listened for, except myself. It was now May, the time

of the annual fair in Rockborough ; and some curiosity which I had expressed concerning it, the night before, had led Cousin Ulick to say that I should visit it under the charge of Miss Penfold, and that he would give me half-a-sovereign to spend there. To witness a fair, which was to me a thing unknown, and to have ten shillings all to myself, were treats not likely to be forgotten by such a little rustic, and on the morning in question I had boldly announced my expectations in the ear of Cousin Marcia. But to my extreme disappointment I found that Miss Ford did not think my pleasure at all certain ; on the contrary, she expressed her belief that I was mistaken in my supposition, and that her brother could never have intended that I should be allowed to visit so low a place as Rockborough fair, and bade me think no more about the matter. To which Miss Penfold,

who always chimed in with Cousin Marcia's dictums, added that a fair was anything but a proper scene for a young lady, and that for her part she was quite assured that did Miss Fleming know what she was likely to witness, she would be the last person to wish to go there.

"But I was not at all assured upon the subject, consequently my disappointment was keen, and I sat for the whole morning lamenting the loss of my half-sovereign and longing to gain speech of Cousin Ulick and ask if he had not really been in earnest.

"When, as I was inking my fingers to the bone over a refractory large-hand copy, I heard the well-known 'click' of the hall-door lock, and with some frivolous excuse to Miss Penfold, I started from my seat and left the room before she had time to stop me.

"There were four apartments on the

ground floor of Cousin Ulick's house ; the dining-room, the consulting-room, and two others which were used as waiting-rooms for patients of the upper and lower classes. In three of these I dared not enter ; but as I bounded down the stairs I heard, to my great delight, his voice proceeding from the dining-room, which proved that he was disengaged, and pushing open the half-closed door, I rushed impetuously to his side, exclaiming—

“ ‘ Cousin Ulick ! did you not say that I might go and see the fair ? ’ ”

“ But then I stopped short, perceiving he was not alone, and blushing violently, pressed closer to him, for there were two gentlemen in the dining-room, to whom my appearance seemed to be a matter of interest, if I might judge from the manner in which they regarded me.

“ ‘ By Jove ! ’ exclaimed one, as he raised

an eye-glass to his eye, 'is that the child, Ford ?'

" 'A remarkable likeness,' said the other ;
'I declare she quite startled me ! fine features !'

" 'Doosidly handsome,' remarked the first. 'Come here, Miss What's - your-name, and give me a kiss !'

" 'No—no !' I exclaimed, as I clung to Cousin Ulick.

" 'Nor a lock of your hair ?'

" 'Certainly not !' I said decidedly.
'How dare you ask me ?' And then I turned away from them and hid my face upon my cousin's coat-sleeve, feeling uncomfortable at their scrutiny, and wondering what right they had to make such observations on my personal appearance.

" 'They are rude !' I murmured, *sotto voce*, in his ear.

" 'No ! Petronel,' he answered, 'they are

not rude. You must be good friends with them. This is your uncle Wilfred,' intimating the gentleman who wore the eyeglass, 'and that your uncle Archibald !'

" 'My uncles !' I exclaimed, with surprise 'Poor mamma's brothers ? I never saw them before, Cousin Ulick !'

" 'Perhaps not,' he replied ; and then all parties seemed to wish to change the topic, whilst I ventured to look up again and scrutinize the strangers in my turn. I found that Uncle Wilfred was tall and thin, and pale, with blue eyes, and fair moustaches and whiskers, that seemed to hang down weakly by themselves, but every time he caught my eye he smiled, and I decided he must be good-natured. My other uncle, Archibald, was the darker, and stronger, and cleverer-looking of the two, but I did not like his face half so well

“ ‘Have you received no answer to your advertisements, no intimation of any kind?’ he was saying when next I attended to their conversation.

“ ‘None whatever,’ was Cousin Ulick’s answer ; ‘nor do I expect to do so.’

“ ‘No letters have been forwarded from the place itself?’

“ ‘No !—nor have arrived ; but as far as I understand from ——, the medical man there, it had been the same thing for some time beforehand, and the debts Sir Lionel cancelled would lead me to suppose that his account was true !’

“ ‘And no loss, either,’ said my uncle Wilfred. ‘It would be a blessing if one could make sure of never hearing the name again. But what do you think the silence intimates, Ford—death or desertion?’

“ ‘It is impossible to say—very probably both. It was her own idea !’

“ ‘If the governor could only be brought to regard it in that light,’ said Uncle Wilfred, slapping his knee, ‘by Jove, I believe his prejudices would evaporate. And I don’t think myself, he could withstand a sight of the child—she’s so doosidly like her mother. She’s her mother over again.’

“ ‘Better looking—more force!’ interposed my Uncle Archibald.

“ ‘Let me take her back with me to Frampton, Ford,’ continued Uncle Wilfred, ‘and I’ll lay a pony you’re never troubled with her again. If the governor did hold out a bit, the old lady would be on our side, and the girl herself would do the rest. He must be pleased with her; she’s such a regular Halsted! *I* never saw such a likeness, by Jove!’ And up went the eye-glass again, and fixed itself upon my features.

“ ‘But I was clinging to Cousin Ulick,

and gazing up into his face. That kind face was troubled, and I felt it was for me!

“‘Say no! say no!’ I whispered hurriedly. ‘I don’t want to go anywhere but to the fair.’”

“‘Come! you’ll let me take her, Ford?’ urged Uncle Wilfred.

“‘No! Wilfred,’ was the [determined answer; ‘Sir Lionel had the offer and rejected it; and Petronel will never visit Frampton with my consent until she is invited there. You know the terms on which this duty was accepted by me—that I should be allowed to perform it without either help or interference, though I thank you all the same for the intention.’ And then he turned to me, and seemed anxious to dismiss me from the room.

“‘Well, little woman! what is it that you want with me? We shall have Miss

Penfold coming in search of you, if we do not take care.'

"At this sentence all my eagerness about the fair returned.

" 'Did you not say, last night, that I might go and see the fair?'

" 'I believe I did.'

" 'Oh! then, do tell Cousin Marcia so; because both she and Miss Penfold say it is so vulgar!'

"At this they all three laughed heartily, and Cousin Ulick engaged to put matters straight for me.

" 'But did I not promise something else besides the fair?' he demanded slyly.

" 'A half-sovereign,' I answered, in a bashful whisper.

" 'Suppose I haven't got a half-sovereign,' he said as he put his fingers in his waistcoat-pocket, and produced in turn, half-crowns, and shillings, and sixpences,

and every coin except the right one. But it appeared at last ; and in my gratitude I threw my arms round his neck and kissed his face until I felt his dear cheeks burn. He was ashamed of being hugged after that fashion, by a great clumsy girl, and before a couple of strangers, too. But I was so pleased at my success, that I had not thought of that.

“ ‘ Lucky fellow, Ford,’ said Uncle Wilfred, and I fancied he was laughing at me, and grew red with indignation.

“ ‘ So you’re going to spend all that at the fair,’ he continued, as he regarded my treasure. ‘ Let me see if I can’t find something to add to it,’ and he dived into his pocket. ‘ I’m not so rich as Cousin Ulick, you know, it’s better to be a doctor than a major ; but if I can find a yellow-boy you shall have it. Why, I declare there’s one !’ as he deposited a sovereign on the table ;

‘it’s a little bit bigger than yours, but it will pass as well. But I must have a kiss for it, mind, just like Cousin Ulick’s, or I shall put it back into my pocket.’

“ ‘Put it back, then,’ I said abruptly, ‘I won’t give a kiss for a sovereign!’

“ ‘Brava!’ he exclaimed. ‘Brava! An answer worthy of a Halstead! I wish the governor could have heard it!’

“But Cousin Ulick seemed displeased.

“ ‘You had better go now, Petronel,’ he said. ‘Your governess will be waiting for you!’

“The tears rushed to my eyes, (I feared I had been very rude). I advanced timidly to Uncle Wilfred, and held out my hand.

“ ‘I *will* give you a kiss, sir!’ I said, ‘and Uncle Archibald too, if he wishes it, for my mother’s sake.’

“Neither of them made reply, but they embraced me several times, and as I turned

to leave them, Cousin Ulick also stooped and kissed me on the forehead. That kiss was very grateful to me, for it was the first which he had voluntarily bestowed.

“ ‘Come, little one !’ said Uncle Wilfred, ‘you must not leave the sovereign behind ; take it—as I took your kisses—for your mother’s sake.’

“The plea was not one to be resisted, and so, when at last I regained the school-room, and recommenced the blotted round-hand copy, I had thirty shillings in my pocket, and the prospect of spending the afternoon at the fair. For that Cousin Ulick would forget his promise to set matters straight for me, I already knew to be impossible. Full of care and business as he was, and insignificant as were my pleasures, to have obtained his word was to have obtained my cause ; and it was only what I fully expected, when Cousin Marcia

announced to Miss Penfold over the luncheon table that Dr. Ford desired she would take Miss Fleming to see the best part of the fair. The acid tones in which this message was delivered, and the incredulous dissatisfaction with which it was received, had no power to mitigate the transport of expectation it raised in me, and as soon as my dinner was concluded, I dragged the unwilling Miss Penfold into the midst of the scene she considered so unfit for both of us, and spent all my money upon presents for various members of the household, including a shell tea-caddy for Cousin Ulick to keep his tea in, and which he accepted from me with many thanks, and the utmost gravity. But from that period my childish troubles became almost too hard for me to bear. I look backwards into the forgotten past, and can distinctly date from Rockborough fair, the time when Cousin

Ulick shewed his affection more openly for me, and Cousin Marcia more openly her spite. I can remember that it was from that day he expressed a wish that I should dine at the late dinner with his sister and himself, and told me if I chose to get up early I should always make his coffee for him, (a duty thitherto entrusted to no hands but Wheeler's), and even spoke of buying me a pony and teaching me the art of riding, (an exercise he often practised in the early mornings), as soon as the weather should be settled.

“I can remember that it was from that day Cousin Marcia took to annoying me in a petty unworthy manner, by such means as setting before me food which she was conscious I disliked, restricting the direction of my daily walks, and keeping story-books and playthings from me on the plea that I was a great deal too old for any

such nonsense. But much as a child's heart makes of little things (and from having lived so countrified a life my heart was peculiarly childish) such trifles would have caused me small annoyance had Cousin Marcia's spite found vent in them alone. I had a healthy appetite which defied the efforts of stale bread and salted butter to upset it; and my walks with Miss Penfold had always been so tame because she would attempt to improve the opportunity, as she called it, by talking botany, geology, or conchology all the time, that it was a matter of indifference to me whether the direction in which she discoursed lay north, south, east or west!

"I certainly felt the loss of my story-books, and had a good cry when I found the wax doll which I had purchased at the fair, lying on the floor, face downwards, with her nose smashed in; but what

aggravated me seriously was to hear Cousin Marcia speak of me and my past life to Miss Penfold, and even to the servants; whilst she often made my ears tingle with insinuations against my dead mother, which were not sufficiently open to be taken notice of.

“She would bring her work into the school-room of a morning, and descant on ignorance and pauperism and her brother’s infatuation, and how she trusted that some day his eyes might be opened, and I knew all the while that she was alluding to myself, although I dared not say so. And Miss Penfold would acquiesce, and condole, and ejaculate, until I longed to jump off my seat and soundly box her ears. And oftener than not their conversation would be broken in upon by an angry rush of tears and an impotent challenge on my part, at which Cousin Marcia would call

me an impudent and daring girl, and my governess would threaten to double my lessons for the morrow if I so far forgot myself again. I think I could have held my own against them, unfeeling as they were towards me, had it not been for those same lessons ; but alas ! my ignorance was such, and my capability of learning by heart had been so little exercised, that I regarded my daily tasks with the utmost horror, and a caution that they should be increased generally made me shrink into myself, and lament in secret that I had been so unfortunate as to survive my mother. She had often called me rude and boisterous, and said I never should be like a lady, but from the moment of my birth until her death I could not remember that she had spoken a harsh word to me. Neglect I had doubtless encountered ; it was almost of necessity it should be so :

but unkindness had not hitherto been my portion, and Heaven knows I felt it bitterly.

“At last matters reached a crisis; not that they were worse upon the day of which I am about to speak than they had been for weeks previously, but that they came to Cousin Ulick’s knowledge.

“We were sitting at the luncheon-table one afternoon, Cousin Marcia, Miss Penfold, and myself; and I was considered to be in particular disgrace, because I had remarked that morning that the more my governess talked about the Rule of Three the less I understood it, and had been promised I should be kept at arithmetic for the remainder of the day in consequence. But I hated it all so that it made little difference to me how I was employed, and I certainly permitted the prospect to make no difference to the quantity of bread and cheese which I consumed; Miss Marcia

having given it as her opinion, in which she was of course seconded by Miss Penfold, that meat more than once a day was quite unnecessary for girls of my age.

“ ‘ You had better make haste with your luncheon !’ she said, sharply, as I attacked the loaf for the third time ; ‘ those sums must be completed by the dinner-hour, and if they are not, your Cousin Ulick will have to hear of the disgraceful way in which you have been behaving.’

“ I have already remarked that Cousin Marcia interfered in my studies, and her interference at this period had gained such a pitch that the school-room discipline seemed to have merged from Miss Penfold’s hands into her own ; and the governess only carried out the hints conveyed to her by Miss Ford.

“ ‘ If they are not finished by dinner-time, your cousin shall certainly hear of

it,' she repeated; a proceeding which, though often threatened, had never yet been put in execution.

" 'Cousin Ulick won't be home to dinner!' I said, as I helped myself to cheese.

" 'Not home to dinner! pray how should you know that? it's like your impertinence to pretend to do so!'

" 'I know, because he told me,' I answered doggedly.

" '*He* told you! my brother confided his probable movements to a child like yourself! I have heard nothing about the matter, and I don't believe it.'

" 'Well, then it's true!' I said, decidedly. 'Cousin Ulick called me into his consulting-room this morning, and told me it was very likely he should not see me again before I went to bed, because he was going out into the country to attend a lady who is very sick, and he might be detained all night;

and he kissed me, and said that must last until to-morrow morning !'

"I gave my evidence boldly, desiring nothing but to clear myself from the imputation of speaking without warrant, and I was quite unprepared for the effect which it had upon my Cousin Marcia. She stared full in my face, until I had concluded, as though ready to deny anything I might advance ; but reading, I suppose, that I had said the truth, she turned very white, made one or two attempts to answer, but finding them ineffectual, burst into a flood of tears instead.

" ' Dear Miss Ford ! ' exclaimed Miss Penfold, flying to her assistance, ' pray do not permit yourself to be upset by such a trifle, and I am surprised, Miss Fleming, ' she continued, turning to me, ' that you should presume to speak to your cousin in such a manner. '

“ ‘What manner?’ I demanded, with genuine surprise ; ‘I only spoke the truth. Cousin Ulick did tell me so !’

“ ‘I don’t believe it ! I cannot believe it !’ gasped Cousin Marcia, between her sobs. ‘*My* brother—who has always been so considerate hitherto—tells me nothing, but goes and confides his intentions to a child like that ! It is *impossible* !’ with a fresh flow of tears.

“ ‘Of course it is impossible !’ cooed Miss Penfold, ‘there is not the least doubt of it. Is it in the slightest degree likely ? Miss Fleming must have mistaken her cousin’s words !’

“ But here was another imputation on my sense or my veracity, and I would not stand it.

“ ‘It is the *truth*, I say !’ I cried, determinately. ‘Ask Cousin Ulick if it is not.

And the place he is gone to is called Fairley Down, that's more.'

"At this indisputable proof that my information was correct, Cousin Marcia turned on me like a fury.

" 'Oh! you wicked, disagreeable, mischief-making little animal! What business had you to go into your cousin's consulting-room at all when you know it's disobedience of orders to do so?'

" 'It cannot be disobedience when he calls me!'

" 'Don't answer me in that way, Miss! You had no right to be hanging about the door.'

" 'I was not hanging about the door.'

" 'That's a falsehood,' said Cousin Marcia, impressively raising her finger; 'Miss Penfold, you will double Petronel's lessons to-morrow for this!'

" 'It is *not* a falsehood,' I exclaimed,

crimsoning under the accusation ; ‘you always say I tell falsehoods, Cousin Marcia, and I do not. Mamma always said I was truthful, and—’

“ ‘Oh, don’t mention your mamma to me,’ she interrupted, rudely, ‘she gave more than enough trouble in her lifetime, and you bid fair to follow her example. I never wish to hear her name!’

“ ‘What trouble ? what do you mean ?’ I asked quickly.

“ ‘It is not likely I’m going to tell all the disgrace of the family to a chit like you,’ she commenced, but she was stopped short by my own voice. My share in the business had been hard enough to bear, but a libel on my dead mother pulled down at one blow the fortress of my patience.

“ ‘How *dare* you ?’ I said, stamping my foot with passionate excitement ; ‘how dare you say anything against mamma ? I

will not bear it; I will not stand it. I will tell Cousin Ulick the minute he comes home. He never called my mother a disgrace to me!

“Then Miss Ford evidently thought she had gone too far, and tried to patch up matters.

“‘No more did I, you foolish girl!’ she said, but I saw that she was trembling.

“‘You did—you did!’ I went on raving, ‘or you meant me to think so, which is just the same. But she was much dearer, and nicer, and prettier than you are; she never made me miserable, as you do, nor took away everything from me that I cared about. I loved her, Cousin Marcia,—and I hate you: I hate you more and more every day, and I shall tell Cousin Ulick so, the minute he comes back!’

“At this rank blasphemy Miss Ford tried force with me, and boxed me soundly

on the ears, when I flew to my own room, and having locked the door, refused to re-appear. It was then about three o'clock in the afternoon, the sun was shining brightly, and there were several hours of daylight before the dinner would arrive, but had there been weeks to intervene it would have made no difference to me, for I was flatly determined that I would not again encounter by myself the woman who could make such gross insinuations against my mother's name. My pride had been sorely wounded; it was not the box upon my ears, by no means the first I had received, that tingled there, so much as the hints which I had heard relative to my dependent position and the aversion with which I was regarded by the household. And yet I felt myself powerless to do more than feel; others had fixed my destination for me, and it was incumbent on me to stay there.

“ Long did I lie upon my bed, with my face buried in the pillows, calling passionately on my mother to come down from Heaven and help me ; and then, as I recognised the impotency of my wishes, relapsing into floods of childish tears, and renewing my old longing to be buried by her side at Saltpool.

“ I heard Miss Penfold’s voice outside the door entreating me, in the language of the newspapers, to be a good girl and come downstairs, and all should be forgiven and forgotten ; yet I paid no attention to her ; and, after a while, came the still harsh tones of Cousin Marcia ordering me to ‘ stop that nonsense, and come down at once,’ but at the sound I only closed my ears with my fingers and buried my face still deeper in the pillow. And then, when another hour or so had passed over us, and the afternoon was lapsing into evening, the

voices came again, much softer now, and coaxing me by promises of holidays and presents to let Pinner wash my face and hands and put on my dress for dinner. But I was still obdurate, and only yielded sufficiently in reply to answer that I wanted none. And then I sobbed afresh, for I was a little angry with myself as well as them, and sobbed myself asleep.

“ ‘ Petronel !’

“ The sound was anything but vehement, but it roused me in a moment, for it was Cousin Ulick’s voice. He had returned to dinner after all. What would he think of me—what say to me ?

“ There was no time to speculate, for he was tapping at the door and mildly, but firmly, desiring to enter ; and, leaping off the bed, I turned the key and flung myself into his arms.

“ ‘ Oh, Cousin Ulick, Cousin Ulick, send

me away! Don't let me stay here any more! Oh, how I wish that I had died with dear mamma!

“ ‘Hush, Petronel! hush, child!’ he said, as he supported me; ‘why, what is all this about?’

“ ‘She says—Cousin Marcia says—that I have no right here; that I have no earthly claim upon you, and that my mother was only a trouble and disgrace!’ I ejaculated as well as my sobs would permit me; ‘and, oh, Cousin Ulick, it has gone on for so long, and I cannot, *cannot* stand it any longer!’ And I proceeded to give the details of the case. I glanced up in his face as I concluded, and I saw that it was sternly, terribly grave, and pale as though the shadow of death had passed above it.

“ ‘Will you undress yourself,’ he said, quietly, ‘and go to bed? and I will come back to you in half-an-hour, Petronel.’

“‘Yes,’ I answered, for I never questioned any wish of Cousin Ulick’s.

“He left me then and went into his dressing-room, and I made ready for my bed, glad at the thought of getting there ; for emotion had exhausted me, and I felt weaker than I had ever done before. When he returned he held in his hand a glass of sparkling wine.

“‘Drink that,’ he said ; ‘and you must eat the dinner I shall send you, and then you may go to sleep.’

“‘And I shall see no more people to-night?’ I inquired, anxiously.

“‘Nobody, except the maid ; and remember, Petronel, whatever others may say to you’—here Cousin Ulick halted for a moment, but, soon recovering himself, went on—‘*no one* in this world has greater claims upon me than yourself. I have adopted you as my child—my dear child—and you

must try to regard me as a—a—father !
Now, don't think any more of what has
passed to-night, but try to go to sleep and
recover your strength, and I will see you
again before I leave home to-morrow.'

"And so he left me ; and the assurance
of his sympathy and the glass of sparkling
wine were both so good for my complaint
that I fell fast asleep before the servant
had time to bring up the dinner he had
promised me."

CHAPTER IX.

DR. FORD RESOLVES TO PART WITH PETRONEL.

THERE can be few things more aggravating to a large-minded man than to watch the wreaking of a woman's petty spite against one of her own sex. It is so utterly incomprehensible to him ; so beneath the workings of his nature ; so opposed to all his ideas of honour and generosity and humane feeling. There are men, of course, or rather animals of the masculine gender, who are not above rendering their families miserable by an adoption of the nagging system ; but, fortunately for earthly happiness, they are few and far between ;

and, when we meet one of the species, we recognise his inferiority to his fellow-creatures by the remark that he goes on "exactly like a woman."

No! For discovering the best ways and means of annoyance, and for unflagging perseverance in pursuit of it; for touching up an old raw skilfully, or thrusting in a probe without remorse; for looking conscious or unconscious, as occasion calls for, and taking the smallest possible blame to herself for want of honour, commend me to a woman, pitted against woman! She may, upon emergence, be honest to the other sex, and, when honest, she is thoroughly faithful and unselfish; but even a woman, open, kindly and generous towards men, will become just the opposite in her intercourse with women. There is an innate and inextinguishable jealousy amongst them from which even the best are not

quite free, and which, in minds of a low order, vents itself in actions of a low standard. Men have been known to storm and rave, and bully and be brutal before now ; but it has been reserved for women to win the first class gold medal for the best method of wearing away a stone by constant dropping. Dr. Ford had seen, from the commencement, that his sister Marcia's feelings towards his ward were most antagonistic ; but he had had no idea, until that evening, that she had dared to carry her malice so far. Having found the case at Fairley Down less imminent than the messenger had led him to suppose, he was enabled to return home in time for dinner, and his first inquiry had been for Petronel, whose laughing " Good night," given that morning, had sounded more than once in his ears during the day, and for whom he had purchased a little trinket as he drove

through the town. He had found his sister sitting with his friend Bertram, who had come over from Oxley, as usual, to take his dinner with them, and at her brother's unexpected appearance and demand, Miss Ford's confusion had been palpable. At first, she had attempted to overcome the difficulty by evasion ; but, finding that he was determined to be answered, and Petronel was determined not to appear, she gave a very garbled statement of the matter, greatly exaggerating the girl's part in it and palliating her own. But Ulick Ford, as has been recorded, took upon himself to learn the truth ; and, when he redescended to the dining-room, his face was, as Petronel expressed it, "terribly stern and pale." His authority had been set at nought in his own household, and he was not a man to brook opposition with impunity. Miss Ford knew that also ; and, uncertain how

far the girl's revelations might not go, waited her brother's reappearance in a very uncomfortable state of fear.

As he descended the staircase he heard her voice, speaking to Mr. Bertram, in tones of wounded anger.

"I call it very hard—very hard indeed, Mr. Bertram, that that child is to be brought into the house to upset all our peace and quietness. She is unruly, and disobedient, and impertinent ; but everything she does is perfection ; and she is neither to be spoken to or corrected. I've been my brother's housekeeper now for twelve years ; and we never had so many words as have passed between us this last month, on account of that girl of the Flemings—a little rough, ill-bred, impudent creature too, as ever you saw. I'm sure it's quite time I went, for if she's to be the mistress of the household, I really cannot stand it any

longer. To have a child like that upheld in her naughtiness before my very face. I think that Ulick has gone mad, and I wish the girl had been dead beside her mother before he—— ;” but here Miss Ford suddenly came to a full stop, and buried her face in her handkerchief to hide the confusion which she felt as her brother entered the apartment.

“Pray go on !” he said quietly, although his mouth was very hardly set. “Don’t let me interrupt you !”

But Miss Marcia commenced to sniffle behind her cambric ambush instead ; and Bertram looked uncomfortable at finding himself party to a domestic disagreement, and wished there had been a fire in the grate that he might have covered his uneasiness by punishing it.

“Why do you not finish, Marcia ?” continued Ulick Ford.

"I was only saying," whimpered his sister, "that if you knew what I have suffered from the rudeness of that girl, Ulick, you would not be so ready to take her part against me as you seem to be. Miss Penfold can tell you what I have gone through ; and that no mother could have taken greater trouble with her clothes, and food, and education, and everything concerning her, and now to be repaid with the basest of ingratitude on her part, and no thanks on yours—I cannot but feel it to be very, *very* hard."

"In what particular instance do you draw on Petronel for gratitude?" he demanded caustically. "For throwing her family in her teeth ; for visiting the errors of the dead on her unoffending head ; or for taunting her with having no claims upon my protection, or your—*generosity*?"

From this address, delivered with all the

severity of a condemning judge, Miss Ford saw no appeal but by relapsing into tears.

“ Oh ! I had better leave ! ” she sobbed. “ If it is to come to this, I had far better leave the house at once ; this night, this very minute, if you choose. I have been foolish and credulous ever to imagine that things could go on in this manner. I might have foreseen that that girl would usurp my place in your affections ; that *she* would be everything, and that I—I, who have looked after your house for the last twelve years and spared neither pain nor trouble to keep things as you wished them—I am nothing ; and the best thing we can do, Ulick, is to—to—to—*part !* ”

He made no answer to this agitated speech, but rang the bell sharply and ordered the dinner to be served at once.

“ One word more,” he said in the temporary absence of the servants. “ Was Miss

Penfold a witness to the disgraceful scene which took place between you and Petronel this afternoon?"

"Of course she was!" murmured Miss Ford, who was employed in drying her eyes, preparatory to making a decent appearance at the dinner table.

"And never interfered; never even remonstrated on your conduct?"

"Do you suppose that she would dare to do so, Ulick?"

"Not even when you boxed the poor child's ears?" persisted Dr. Ford.

At this, his sister reddened considerably; but she still attempted a defiant answer.

"I should have been very much surprised if she, or anyone had done so!" was the reply.

"Very well," he said carelessly, "then, when Miss Penfold comes to-morrow morning, you will tell her from me, if you please,

that her services are no longer required here."

"Dismiss Miss Penfold! Ulick? We shall have to pay her a quarter's salary; besides there is no just cause for doing so!"

"I consider that there is more than sufficient cause. I engaged her to perform certain duties, and she has failed in them. I shall trust her no longer. As for payment you may give her a year's salary, if you like, but she does not occupy her position here another day!"

"You will have the whole of Rockborough talking about your conduct!" said Miss Ford, panting with indignation; "and what is to be done with that girl, I should like to know, if Miss Penfold goes away?"

"My concern, from first to last!" he replied coolly. "And now, let us have our dinner and change the subject. I think we have given poor Bertram enough of it!"

Whereupon he sat down to table, and conversed with his friend as pleasantly as usual, asking after the health of the live stock and state of the garden at Oxley Vicarage, and giving him all the news of Rockborough in return, with such apparent interest, that a stranger might have supposed the events of an hour before had completely faded from his memory, but not so Mr. Bertram, or his sister. The former traced deep vexation beneath the seeming lightness of his manner, and the latter felt he was in earnest, and knew that with her brother earnestness meant deeds as well as words. She knew Miss Penfold's doom was sealed, for Dr. Ford never departed from his word ; and she trembled to think what fate might not also be in store for herself. She had a narrow mind, which, after years of close companionship, could not stretch itself to measure his ; and she

judged of her brother's intentions by what her own would have been. She was not worthy of being the same blood. As dinner was concluded, she rose from her seat and was about to leave the room. Dr. Ford was engaged in a deep argument with Bertram ; but he perceived her action, and interrupted his discourse to make the quiet aside—

“Where are you going, Marcia ?”

“Only to the drawing-room,” she answered, humbly, “to fetch my work, Ulick !”

“Very good. No going to Petronel's room, if you please ! The child has been worried enough to-day. Leave her to sleep off the effects of her agitation.” And then, as the door closed behind Miss Ford, the men seemed by mutual consent to drop the subject they had been discussing, and to become silent and uneasy.

"It is impossible this can go on, Bertram," said Ulick Ford, after a pause, as he pushed the decanter towards his friend. "The child's life is rendered wretched, and I suppose Marcia's is not much better. I must make an alteration somewhere."

"It doesn't look as though they hit it off very well together," remarked Bertram. "Miss Ford seems confoundedly—I mean, considerably put out about the business."

"The question is, what alteration to make," resumed Ulick Ford, thoughtfully. "A larger house would not mend matters, for I can't prevent my sister coming in contact with her."

"No! but why not send the child to school?"

"What! send her away: out of the house: to a boarding-school?"

"Yes. I think it would be by far the

best plan. She wants education and amusement; and a few years later Miss Ford and she may get on better than they do now."

Ulick Ford turned suddenly about and commenced to walk up and down the room.

"I never thought of sending Petronel away," he said, quietly.

He had never thought of it, and as he did so, a sharp pain shot through his breast, which startled him. Was it possible that this child of Cissy Fleming's was winding herself about his heart? That her presence was becoming necessary to his contentment? At the mere notion Ulick Ford made up his mind that he would part with her: that he would learn to do that voluntarily which he might at any moment be called upon to do; and when he had arrived at this determination, the matter

was no longer one of choice, but of necessity.

"You are right, Bertram," he said, after a few turns, "a good boarding-school will be the best place for Petronel. I have pledged myself to look after her happiness and well-being; but it would be unfair, both to my sister and herself, to keep her here to be a constant source of dissension in the household."

"Miss Ford has certainly great claims upon you," remarked Bertram.

"Undoubtedly she has. I am the last person to deny that; and I feel I am bound to consult her interests. Still, I consider she has shown a most unamiable spirit in this matter, and—I'm not going to have the child bullied, and there's an end of it."

"You have heard me speak of the school at Antwerp, where my sisters are

placed !” said Bertram, after an interval of silence.

“ No !—have I ? I have forgotten : but what of it ? ”

“ I think it would be just the place for Miss Fleming. Jessie and Ellen—who are about her age—are extremely happy there, and my mother speaks of the school itself in the highest terms.”

“ Antwerp is a long way off ! ” said Ulick Ford. He had thought of a boarding-school in Rockborough, where he might see the child as often as he pleased ; but detecting himself in this second weakness, inwardly resolved that if his inquiries proved satisfactory, Antwerp should be the place.

“ It’s nothing of a journey,” replied Mr. Bertram. “ Our girls go safely enough : my father puts them on board the steamer at St. Katherine’s Wharf, and a teacher is sent to meet them at the other side. Num-

bers of children pass backwards and forwards from school to home in that way."

"I would rather take your mother's opinion on such a subject than that of any lady known to me," said Ulick Ford ; "and her recommendation of the school would go a long way. I must write to her about it. My sister and I have been so utterly unused to children"—here the speaker heaved something very like a sigh—"we know so little of their ways or their requirements, that I suppose I ought never to have undertaken such a charge."

"Oh ! come, Ford ! you are going too far ; there's no reason because things don't rub quite smoothly at first that they should never do so. But without doubt Miss Petronel is a girl of remarkable spirit, on whom undue coercion might have bad effects. She wants companions of her own age, and will get on twice as well at school

as at home. And when she is grown up, with her education finished, and herself no longer subject to Miss Ford's control, you will find them agree well enough."

"That's a long time to look forward to," remarked the other.

"Do you think so? it will come sooner than you imagine. Girls grow up very fast now-a-days, and in three or four years Miss Fleming will be a woman."

In three or four years!—so soon! The idea was anything but palatable to him. He must separate himself from her as a child; and when a woman she would separate herself from him. He could not hope to keep her beside his hearth; and the same thought seemed to strike his friend, for he continued, laughing:

"You will not have much trouble with your ward after that time, I fancy, unless it be to keep suitors at bay. Miss Petro-

nel is not the sort of young lady to hang long on hand. She will be a very beautiful woman."

"Do you think so?" was the curt rejoinder.

"I don't think about the matter: I'm sure of it; and were you not such a thorough old bachelor, Ford, you would have found it out for yourself. Why, where are your seven senses? Her skin and hair and features are sufficient to make a beauty of her, and joined to the expression of her eyes and mouth, are irresistible to me. Glorious eyes: they seem to look right through one!"

"Have another glass of wine," said Ulick Ford; and by the time that Bertram had helped himself, he found his friend had started a different topic, and Petronel Fleming was not mentioned again between them.

But when Mr. Bertram had departed, and the household was at rest, Dr. Ford sat down to indite, amongst other correspondence, a letter to the clergyman's mother, in which he asked for all necessary details respecting the school at Antwerp, and particularly if he could place his ward there at once. For as the separation was to be, he felt the sooner it took place the better.

A few days brought the answer, which was as satisfactory as he could have hoped to find it.

Mrs. Bertram, a lady of great experience, and the mother of a numerous family, could not speak too highly of the school in question. Her younger daughters, as she reminded Dr. Ford, had been reared in the country, and deprived of the advantages obtainable for children in a town, and therefore she had been advised to put

them to a foreign school as the quickest means of making up for lost time, but for awhile had been so prejudiced against the idea of parting with them, that she had been unable to make up her mind to it. But she never could be sufficiently glad that she had done so. The establishment at which they had been placed was situated at *numero 40, Rue des Capucines, Antwerp*, and was conducted by a Madame Gobeaux, and a Miss Little, under whose care Jessy and Ellen had made such wonderful progress, that their improvement was only equalled by the happy life they led there. Here Mrs. Bertram rambled off into lengthy statements of dress, diet, and vacations, interesting to no one but her correspondent, and Dr. Ford laid the letter down with a sigh. There was apparently not one objection to the plan which he had thought of; not a loophole through

which he might escape with comfort to his conscience. He had told himself that Petronel was very young to go so far away from home, but Jessy and Ellen Bertram were not much older ; that she was too ignorant to take her place in a large, thriving school, but their education had also been neglected ; that he had promised, as far as in him lay, to ensure her happiness as well as comfort, but these girls were parted from their own relations, and yet confessed that they had all they wished for. It was very evident that his scruples were for himself and not for Petronel, and therefore they were not to be regarded, or rather, all the more to be ignored ; for Ulick Ford had so long trained himself not to care for trifles (or what he considered such), that he felt angry and contemptuous, as though detected in a folly, when he found they had the power to annoy him ; which

feeling tended as much as anything to fix the destination of Petronel Fleming ; and as soon as the necessary arrangements were completed between Rockborough and Antwerp, he took her to the latter place himself, and left her under the safe charge of Madame Gobeaux and Miss Little.

On the third day he returned. Miss Marcia, who, though silently indignant at her brother considering it necessary to see that "odious girl" to the end of her journey, could not but rejoice that at any cost the house was rid of her, had ordered the very best of dinners and put on the most smiling of faces wherewith to welcome him back to the home where peace had been restored. But neither the dinner nor the beaming countenance were to the taste of Dr. Ford, that evening. He ate little, and talked less ; retired to his own room as soon

as the meal was concluded ; and when Wheeler went to announce that coffee was ready, was found to have left the house—"without telling me a word of what he had done, or where he had been, or anything about it," as Miss Ford (who, notwithstanding her pretended want of interest in Petronel, had been dying with curiosity to hear some particulars of the journey,) remarked the next day to her bosom friend Miss Matilda Upjohn ; "but really men are so strange. I'm sure, my dear, the more I see of them the more thankful I am to have kept as clear of the sex as I have. A brother is bad enough—a husband must be something awful !"

"Well, I don't know," simpered Miss Matilda Upjohn, who was not quite innocent of thinking occasionally that some people's brothers might make very tolerable other people's husbands. "We must all

have our trials in this world, you know, dear ; and it would be cowardly to shirk them," which remark was indeed so far ingenuous that had Miss Matilda's trial appeared in the shape of matrimony, she would have been the last person to run away from it.

But it did not console Miss Ford for the total silence which the doctor continued to maintain towards her, with regard to Petronel Fleming, although each week she knew that he received a scrawled and blotted envelope from Antwerp, nor for the minimum of leisure he bestowed upon herself. She thought that he had never appeared to have so much work to do in his life before, nor so little time to spend at home, and her complaints upon the subject to Pinner, and other sympathisers, became more numerous every day. She even arrived at the point of questioning herself whether the house

had not been more agreeable when Cissy Fleming's daughter (notwithstanding the nuisance of her presence) made one of the home circle.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY OF PETRONEL.

“**I** HAVE been advised that it is as unnecessary as it would be imprudent, to enter into further details of this period of my life, since subsequent events, which held far greater influence over me, will call for wider space. In my relation, therefore, of what took place during the next two years, I will be as brief as possible.

“I woke up on the morning following my grand adventure, to find Miss Penfold had been summarily dismissed, that Cousin Marcia’s actively-enforced authority had degenerated into silent coldness, and that

some important change was evidently looming on the horizon of my fate. In a few days more I was informed of what it was. Cousin Ulick had decided that I should be sent to school. I don't think I was sorry at the news, and I think he was disappointed at my not appearing so. But I had so much dreaded the engagement of another governess, and a return to the dreary routine in Cousin Marcia's morning-room, that I hailed the prospect of new scenes and young companions, and did not hesitate to shew it, even when I heard my destination was to be a town called Antwerp, and that to reach it I must cross the sea. Distance and separation were but names to me, who had so few to care for in the land I left. The only creature that I loved was Cousin Ulick, and the idea of visiting a strange country almost compensated for that trouble. At least I thought so till the

moment came for parting with him, and then I felt it almost as bitterly as when my mother died. He took me there himself. At this distance I can look back and wonder at what seemed but natural to my ignorance then, that a man, occupied and famous, should have thought it worth his while to bestow both time and trouble on a child of whom he knew so little. But so it was, and in his tender unobtrusive care of me during the sea voyage and railway journey, I began to appreciate what I was about to lose in him, and when he left me under the joint care of a tall, sandy-haired Englishwoman called Miss Little, and a short, merry-faced Belgian lady named Madame Gobeaux, I cried heartily, and clinging round his neck, begged him to take me back to Rockborough with him. But though exquisitely gentle, he was very firm, and having condescended to explain

why he considered a school life the best for me at present, he tried to cheer me with the near prospect of the summer holidays, and then abruptly took his departure. At first I was not to be comforted. Cousin Ulick had laden me with farewell gifts and pocket-money, and I had been introduced to two nice quiet-looking English girls called Jessy and Ellen Bertram, the sisters of a gentleman whom I had often met at Rockborough, and recommended to make friends with them ; but neither one fact nor the other had any power to console me. I wanted Cousin Ulick. I longed for the touch of that strong gentle hand which I discerned no longer, and the glance of those kind eyes which I felt as though I never should see more. I sobbed so bitterly as soon as he was gone, that neither governesses nor schoolfellows could make anything of me, and at last they let me go to

bed, and sleep off the effects of my emotion and fatigue.

“With the morning came re-action, and my cheerfulness was soon restored, for extreme youth has seldom the capacity of cherishing sorrow, and everything in my new abode was so delightfully strange and curious to me. Besides, I woke to popularity, for the liberal manner in which my outfit had been provided for me, and the arrangements for my board and education made, had magic influence over my companions, and before the end of the first day everyone was desirous of effecting an acquaintanceship with me, and I was holding up my empty head amongst them as though I had been a scholar or a queen, instead of only an ignorant little pauper. School-girls are terrible toadies, and there are few creatures more overbearing than their universally-elected favourite. Why I became

so at *Numero 40, Rue des Capucines* (unless on account of Cousin Ulick's generosity, and the rumour that I was heiress to a great English *milord*) it is difficult to say, but the result was to make me quickly intimate with every class of girls assembled there, and consequently to save me from most of the disagreeables usually encountered by strangers on entering a large educational establishment.

"The '*pensionnat des demoiselles*' kept by Miss Little and Madame Gobeaux was, as may be supposed, a mixed one ; most of the foreign pupils being Roman Catholics, and the English, Protestants ; and having said so much, it is almost needless to add that the latter class were the better born and bred of the two.

"Quiet, countrified Mrs. Bertram (who I afterwards ascertained to have been the means of introducing this school to the

notice of my guardian) and Cousin Ulick, absorbed in his professional studies, had probably never had the fact brought beneath their notice, that as a rule the higher families of France and Germany and Belgium educate their daughters at home or in a convent, and would consider them degraded by entering a boarding-school, so that the foreign pupils met *en pensionnat*, with whom young English ladies acquire French, are chiefly children of the middle classes, or upper tradesmen. I do not mention this as a reflection upon either their grammar or their companionship, but simply to account for much that I shall have to relate hereafter. The establishment at which I was placed, was no exception to this rule. The building itself, which was rambling and spacious, had formerly been a convent, and was surrounded by a large walled-in garden, recreation in

which formed our chief exercise, as, excepting to church, we were seldom trusted outside the gates. The pupils who, exclusive of *externes*, numbered nearly a hundred, were culled from every country in Europe, only twenty of them, perhaps, being English. We had square-built, hard-featured Dutch girls, and stolid, good-tempered Germans; blue-eyed, saucy Belgians, and sallow, dark-haired French; and, though all obliged to wear the same costume, the medley we presented in the class-rooms was most apparent. Our dress was neat and simple, but it never varied all the year round. On week days, black alpaca frocks, with a broad blue ribbon across the breast, bearing the number of our class; on Sundays, black silk, with a knot of white upon the shoulder, and small black hats trimmed with fluted ribbon, to which, in winter, was added a black cloth mantle

covering us to the feet. There was not much impetus afforded to our vanity here, and yet it managed to creep out in many a fantastical mode of dressing the hair, or wearing the knots of ribbon; for if the liberty of the subject is openly curtailed, he generally finds some means of enjoying it in private. And we certainly had (or, after my bold rough life, it appeared so to me) very little liberty accorded us at *Numero 40, Rue des Capucines*. The school plan, having been formed, I suppose, on the combined judgment of Miss Little and Madame Gobeaux, united much of the liberality of English establishments with the restrictions of foreign ones, and whilst the table was amply provided, and our comforts in other respects well attended to, the license permitted us in freedom from supervision was very small. This restraint, considered so necessary for young girls abroad,

was doubtless wholesome for all of us, but it engendered, as it too often does, distrust of our superiors, and in many cases a desire to circumvent their vigilance by fraud.

“We were never left alone, except it might be by the under-teacher’s negligence of orders, and to bribe or coax these subordinates to infidelity, was the daily ambition of some one or other of us. Our education was conducted on the plan of public classes and lectures—the best plan of all when the pupil is advanced, but terribly difficult for a creature who knows nothing. Master succeeded master, and mistress, mistress, at the desk in the large class-rooms, all day long ; and for the first few weeks I could do no more than hang my head and grow red when I was asked a question, until some one stepped in to my relief by explaining that I did not understand the language. But at the end of

that time I began to pluck up courage. I was ambitious, and I was quick, and had soon picked up sufficient French wherewith to prosecute my studies ; and having once commenced, I went on rapidly. Endued with vigorous health, and a strong, active mind, I was just at the age when learning is no trouble ; and as soon as I could take a fair place in my class, I became as happy and interested in my own progress as it was natural for me to be ; so that when August arrived, and I found myself journeying homewards in company with the Bertrams, if it had not been for the prospect of seeing Cousin Ulick again, I should almost have felt sorry to be going there.

“ But a surprise awaited me. I was not to spend my holidays at Rockborough, but at a country place called Oxley, with the family of Jessie and Ellen Bertram. At first hearing I was sorry for this : after-

wards. I was very glad, for the Bertrams were charming people, who were as kind to me as though I had been one of themselves; and let me run about the green fields and despoil the orchard, in company with my school-fellows, for six happy weeks, at the end of which time we all went back to Antwerp together. And it must not be supposed I saw nothing of my Cousin Ulick all that period, for he came to Oxley before I had been there a week, and many times afterwards, and rapturous were the greetings I bestowed upon him. He sent over a short, fat pony for my use, on which Ellen and Jessie and myself rode about by turns; and he told me he was very much pleased with the report Miss Little had sent of me, and the improvement I had made. And when I went back to school he gave me a beautiful little gold watch and chain, of which I was

exceedingly proud. But I did not see Cousin Marcia once all the holidays, and I don't think I even asked how she was.

“My second term at Antwerp passed more pleasantly than the first. By the end of that time I had made myself fully acquainted with all the rules and habits of the school. I was at home there: had commenced to feel some confidence in my own powers, and to exhibit a taste for painting, which gained me much credit with my masters.

“I returned to Rockborough at Christmas, taller in stature by half an inch, and wonderfully developed in my understanding. I could see now how perverse and unruly I had been on first knowing Cousin Marcia; how much I must have upset the comfort of the household, and resolved, if only for Cousin Ulick's sake, that I would never do it again. Miss Ford met me un-

demonstratively, but made no allusion to the past, and after a few days I think she was struck with the improvement in my manners, for she generally took me out walking with her, and never said anything that was positively unkind. But Cousin Ulick seemed more reserved towards me here than he had been at Oxley, and I was still too young to guess the reason of the change, and fretted at it.

“Still the Christmas holidays passed peacefully away, and at the close of them, whilst wetting her brother’s face with my impetuous tears, I felt a little sorry to part even with Cousin Marcia ; and though she never grew, like Cousin Ulick, to be fond of me, I grew too sensible to take umbrage at chance words, and thenceforth, with an occasional difference of opinion, we managed to rub on pretty well together. And so lapsed the succeeding twelvemonth, during

which period I paid two visits to Rockborough, finding myself each time more loath to say good-bye, and more anxious to return.

“It was again spring : the spring of my fifteenth birthday, and when I reached Antwerp with the Bertrams, we found that—as usual—alterations had been making in our absence : that several old school-fellows were gone, and ten or twelve new pupils recruited in their stead. Amongst them was one who bore an active part in the ruling of my future destiny, and whom, therefore, I shall introduce at once : her name was Félicité d’Alvan, and we took a fancy to each other at first sight. I had not been in the habit, hitherto, of associating intimately with the foreign pupils ; for though merry and amusing enough, there was a want of honour and uprightness amongst them from which I shrunk ;

but it was impossible to look on the face of Félicité d'Alvan, and imagine her deceitful. She was by birth a Belgian: in figure *petite*, but full: in complexion, *blonde*, with very fair hair, and large blue eyes, that looked upon occasions as innocent as those of a child, but had a roguish twinkle in them when amused, which, though the reverse of child-like, was still more enchanting. I was then just verging on fifteen, and she was two years older; yet we seemed to come together by mutual attraction, which increased with better knowledge.

“To me, who had found the Bertrams, with all their good-nature, to be just a little stupid as companions, Félicité was charming; full of fun, full of anecdote, ripe for any mischief, and talking of everything in and out of school like a little woman of the world. Notwithstanding

which, she was no further advanced in study than myself, but that circumstance only threw us the more together, and developed our attachment. The society of Félicité imparted a zest to my lessons which they had never had before ; she made me in all things her companion and confidante, and before we had been a month together, we were acknowledged bosom friends.

“Such company was not the best thing in the world for me, for not only was Félicité d’Alvan my senior in age, but, notwithstanding the deficiencies of her education, her mind was so much more advanced than mine that, save in one respect, I was her pupil. She exercised over me the influence which girls just budding into womanhood possess for curious children a few years younger than themselves. I accepted her information as gospel ; con-

sidered her full-grown in every respect, and myself next door to it for having been elected to her friendship. And, out of my gratitude and admiration, the bond resolved itself, as such bonds usually do, into Félicité swaying me exactly as she chose, and my degenerating to her willing slave. It was not long before I found that the manners and customs of Miss Little's establishment were not at all in harmony with the tastes of my new friend. She had never heard of such absurd rules ; she had imagined she was coming to a *pensionnat*, and not a convent. Was it possible that we never went outside those walls except to church ? or that, if so, we were not allowed to walk through the town ? Did I mean to tell her, seriously, that I had never visited the cathedral, nor the museum, nor the Church of St. Paul ? That I had lived in Antwerp for nearly two years and had not seen the

Jardins Zoologiques, nor even knew the names of the streets through which I passed to church? Bah! it was incredible. Félicité would not give *that* (with a snap of her pretty fingers) for girls of so little spirit or adventure. But what could you expect from Germans or Dutch? with an emphasis anything but complimentary upon the words; and, *pour les Anglais*, '*pardonnez-moi, mamie*,' continued the little Belgian, 'but I have not often met a specimen of that nation with so much *chic* about her as yourself.' And, without being quite clear as to the whole meaning of that comprehensive term '*chic*,' I nevertheless knew it was intended for a compliment, and accepted it accordingly. But Félicité's animadversions on the strictness with which we were kept in bounds touched me nearly. How often I had longed, since coming there, to be allowed to traverse the wonderful old

town at my leisure, and see something of the many curiosities I had been told that it contained ! How often had I envied the Roman Catholic pupils who attended mass with Madame Gobeaux every morning, and were regularly taken to see all the religious *fêtes* and processions ; whilst we poor Protestants stayed at home to hear Miss Little sonorously read a long commentary on the daily portion of Scripture through her nose, or were permitted half-an-hour's airing in the garden instead. And Félicité's half-jesting, half-earnest pity for the faith in which I had been reared, and her expostulations with me to change it as soon as possible, used only to render me discontented, who had erstwhile been so happy, and impatient with the coercion thought necessary for me.

“ It was thus, by little and little, that the influence of Félicité d'Alvan prepared

me for what followed, and paved the way for my joining her in an overt act of rebellion. Miss Little's was not the first *pensionnat* at which this young lady had been placed ; and, upon my sacred promise to keep the fact a secret, she confided to me that her departure from the last, a school at Brussels, had not been voluntary ; but she had been expelled thence for the merest trifle in the world—only fancy ! because she had received and answered a letter from one of her admirers. As if a girl of her age could be expected to exist without such things ! It was absurd ! It betrayed the ignorance of the poor creature under whose charge she had been placed. And so her parents had removed her, and she had come to Antwerp instead ; and I was not to whisper a word of the affair, under pain of never being spoken to by her again, for, if it came to the ears of 'Mees' or

Madame, she should never gain an opportunity of having a little fun whilst there, and Félicité had no intention of giving up her fun, she could assure me. To this narration I listened with wide-open eyes. An admirer ! a lover ! To raw fifteen the word alone conveyed an area of unknown delight—a thing that seemed hardly probable even in the future, and impossible at the distance of only two years. And yet Félicité knew all about it, and I was eager to learn particulars of her ; how tall the admirer had been ; what he was like ; where she had met him, and in what words he had made love to her.

“At which questions my experienced friend smiled compassionately, whilst she assured me that I should think nothing of it when I had arrived at her age ; and that, though the gentleman in question (who, by the way was English, a Mr. Ernest Moore)

was *tout ce qu'il y a de plus beau*, he had been but one amongst a number, and she did not care a bit more for him than for any of the others. Which assertion greatly raised her in my estimation; and, when she added that she only trusted none of them would come bothering after her to Antwerp, I admired her still more. It was now summer weather again. The out-door *fêtes* had commenced, and we could not walk backwards and forwards to church without reading announcements of concerts and other festivities that made our mouths water. Added to which, there was scarcely an evening that Miss Little and Madame Gobeaux, and often some of the teachers, did not spend at the Botanical or Zoological Gardens, returning as late as twelve o'clock at night; whilst we, more discontented than ever, were left at home to recreate ourselves by learning our lessons for the

next day under the charge of a little German subordinate, whose chief duties were to darn our stockings and keep silence in the class-rooms.

One morning I felt particularly dull and enervated ; for Félicité had commenced to abuse the school and everything concerning it, directly she opened her eyes ; and Miss Little had kept us listening to a commentary on Leviticus for nearly three-quarters of an hour. But, as I was listlessly obeying the summons of the breakfast bell, and thinking with pleasure that there was only a month left to the holidays, my friend, just home from mass, overtook me in the corridor, and, to my surprise, I saw that her demeanour was entirely changed. She had left the house unwillingly—almost angrily ; she returned to it with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes, that danced with some hidden expectation.

I threw my arm round her waist and pressed her to reveal the cause; but she bade me keep silence till she could speak to me alone, an opportunity for which I anxiously watched. At last it came: in an interval of leisure we met in one of the empty class-rooms, and I flew to her side.

“ ‘Félicité,’ I exclaimed, ‘what is it?’

“ ‘*Mamie*,’ she answered (she could never bring her foreign tongue to pronounce my barbarous name, which, she declared, was only fit for people who had teeth like horses and mouths from ear to ear—Félicité was not always so complimentary to my nation as she might have been)—‘*Mamie*, will you promise to do me a favour?’ and, like a rash young fool, I promised, not having reached the age when ‘if I can’ follows ‘I will.’

“ ‘That is right!’ she answered, clapping her hands. ‘There is one good trait about

you English—if you promise a thing you always do it. So I can depend upon you, *mamie*, without whom there is no pleasure for your poor *Félicité*,' and she laid her head coaxingly upon my shoulder.

“‘What do you want me to do?’ I demanded, beginning to fear I might have promised too much.

“‘Oh, it is nothing—a mere *bagatelle*; stoop your ear closer, *mamie*—we mustn’t let the walls hear us! It is only that we are going to the *Jardins Zoologiques* together, you and I, this evening, to hear the open-air concert—that is all!’

“‘To the *Jardins Zoologiques*?’ I exclaimed, starting from her in my astonishment. ‘But how—has Madame given us leave?’

“‘Given us leave? Bah! you little simple,’ said *Félicité*. ‘Will a gaoler dare to let out the prisoners committed to

charge? much less Mees or Madame the two best-looking girls in their school: and to the *Jardins*, too! *Mon Dieu, quel idée!*'

"'But, then, how can we go, Félicité?"

"'How did we go—not one time, but twenty—from our school at Brussels! By *finesse*, *mamie*, as we shall go this evening, and no one will be ever the wiser. Leave all that to me; not that I would propose such a thing to any girl in the *pensionnat* but yourself; there is not another worth *that* to me' (with her favourite snap of the fingers); 'a set of heavy *fräuleins*, who have it not in them to know what "*chic*" means. But you are different, *mamie*, you are my friend; clever, handsome, spirited—and you have promised to do as I ask you.'

"'Had it not been for this unlucky promise, I am sure that, notwithstanding my

affection for Félicité, and my great desire to see something of foreign 'life,' I should have refused to accede to her proposal, which I knew to be in defiance of what was right ; but curiosity and false shame at the idea of being classed with the mean-spirited Germans and Dutch, combined to urge me forward until I had renewed it ; and my fate once sealed I became eager to know the means by which it was to be accomplished. But on this point Félicité chose to keep her own counsel, not being able, I believe, at that moment, to reveal it, only begging me to leave all the arrangements to her, and have no fears upon the subject. It was *un fait accompli*—we should go !

“ ‘But what made you think particularly of to-night, Félicité ?’ I asked hurriedly, as the sound of approaching footsteps warned us that the class was re-assembling. ‘You

seemed so dull and out of sorts this morning.' But Félicité only answered me with a roguish look and a finger laid upon her lip.

" ' *Tais toi, chérie,*' she whispered ' *et tu verras.*' "

CHAPTER XI.

THE STORY OF PETRONEL—CONTINUED.

“THE prospect of the evening’s dissipation did not tend to concentrate my attention on the classes of the day, but the feeling by which I was swayed respecting it was less pleasure than anxiety. I was too unused to such illegal escapades not to dread the consequence of probable detection ; but at the same time I had unbounded faith in Félicité, and was most curious to ascertain how she would manage matters so as to avoid it. Tardily, the long hot afternoon dragged itself away, but it was gone at last, and the main business of the day concluded. By five o’clock the

masters and *externes* had taken their departure ; at seven, Miss Little and Madame Gobeaux, together with several of the resident teachers, followed suit, and by nine the sheepfold was unguarded, save by two German governesses, Fräulein Netta, and Fräulein Graub, who were much more afraid of the hundred lambs of which they were left in charge than the lambs were of them.

“Fräulein Graub, perceiving that the flock seemed quietly disposed, retired to her room to write letters ; leaving Fräulein Netta, who was weak-eyed and very submissive, darning stockings close to her nose, at the head of the long table where we learned our lessons. Félicité edged herself to my side.

“ ‘Be ready to come upstairs directly the bell rings,’ she whispered. ‘We must be up and down again before the dormitories

are filled.' And I acquiesced, though not without a quaking fear.

"The order of the dormitories at our *pensionnat* was as follows:—The rooms, which were very small, having formerly been cells for nuns, were situated on either side of a long corridor, and held four beds each, two of which were appropriated to younger pupils and two to elder; a rule supposed to enable us to help the children in their dressing. These cells contained no furniture except the beds, and a couple of chairs, as the lavatories were public, and the pupils' clothes were all kept together in a room at the further end of the corridor. In the centre of each cell hung a lamp. At nine o'clock, (the younger pupils having gone to bed at eight), a bell rung for the elder girls to retire to their dormitories, where half-an-hour was allowed them for disrobing, after which time one of the Ger-

man teachers alluded to, went her rounds and extinguished every lamp that was still burning. If, however, the light had been put out, she merely closed the door. Such were Miss Little's rules, and they rendered the first part of our adventure comparatively easy. As soon as the bell rung that evening, according to Félicité's instructions, we rushed upstairs together, and went into our dormitory. The younger pupils, little girls of eight and ten, were sleeping soundly, and from beneath the bed Félicité produced two dark bundles which she thrust into my hands.

“ ‘Our cloaks !’ she said hurriedly; ‘they are all that we shall require. Come on, *mamie*.’

“ ‘Oh ! Félicité, how did you procure them ?’

“ ‘Never mind ! I will tell you afterwards. We have no time to lose.’ And

extinguishing the lamp, she drew me downstairs again, where we mingled with the crowd as though we were about to follow it to bed.

“ ‘Good-night, Fräulein, good-night!’ echoed from all sides; and then the girls commenced to toil up the steep staircase; and Félicité and I found our way through an unfrequented lobby into the garden.

“ ‘How are we to get out this way?’ I ventured to ask, as we struck into a sequestered bye-path.

“ ‘Through the *grille*. I have the key!’ she answered. ‘Was it not a good idea—no one ever uses it? We can go out and enter as often as we please.’

“ ‘But the lobby-door, it will be locked,’ I suggested, as I laid my hand upon her arm.

“ ‘No fear of that, *mamie*; I threw the

key amongst the bushes, so Susette cannot possibly lock it to-night, whatever she may do to-morrow. But you are positively trembling. You do not mean to tell me you are not going to enjoy yourself.'

" 'Oh, yes! I hope so; but Félicité, suppose we were found out, what should we do?'

" 'My Belgian chum was very contemptuous of my fear.

" ' "*Bah ! enfant,*" she said deridingly, 'why are you so afraid? I tell you, neither Mees nor Madame will find us out; but were it *une chose impossible*, where would be the fun? Ah! you are but English after all.'

" 'Then you don't think that Miss Little and Madame Gobeaux are at the *Jardins Zoologiques*, themselves?' I said re-assuringly.

" 'I do not think—I know they are,

mamie, all the world is there this evening ; it is an extra concert.'

" ' And will they not see us then ?'

" ' See us ! in that crowd ! but what am I saying ? I forget that you are a poor unfortunate, that has never mixed in such a scene. *Allons, mamie*, put on your cloak, and leave me to take care of you. Should we meet the griffins face to face we have but to draw on these hoods.'

" So saying, Félicité drew me after her, not at all unwillingly, and having with some difficulty unlocked the rusty *grille*, we passed beyond the precincts of the convent-garden, and stood upon the open road.

" It was still dusk ; the town lamps were burning, but the moon had not yet risen ; and the uncertain light threw our dark figures into deeper shadow ; a most favourable time for an unlawful exploit.

"We closed the *grille* upon the outer side, and I wished to leave the key within the lock, but Félicité argued, that were it moonlight an hour hence, it might attract attention.

" 'Safer in my pocket, *mamie*,' she exclaimed, as she deposited it there, 'Mees and Madame will not be home till nearly midnight, but we must return by eleven at the latest, and we should find ourselves in a pretty plight if some one stole the key meanwhile. But here it is secure. And now *vive le plaisir* !'

"She linked her arm in mine as she spoke, and we proceeded gaily on our way. The *Jardins Zoologiques* were situated close by the railway station, a quarter of a mile from the *rue des Capucines*, but our light feet traversed the distance in a few minutes ; and I became quite excited with the description Félicité gave me of all I

should see there, when suddenly the girl stopped speaking, pressed my arm closer, and commenced to sidle along the pathway, which extraordinary proceedings caused me to glance upwards, and see a young man who approached us, hat in hand.

“ ‘Mademoiselle d’Alvan! is it possible that I have the pleasure of seeing you?’

“ ‘*Mon Dieu!*’ exclaimed Félicité, with well-acted surprise, ‘you are the very last person I should have thought of meeting!’ and then she turned to me, and in a conscious manner introduced the new comer as Mr. Ernest Moore.

“I looked at him with the greatest curiosity; this lover who had actually fulfilled Félicité’s undesired prophecy by following her to Antwerp, and I saw a slight, dark, gentlemanly young Englishman of from eighteen to twenty years of age, who appeared very much pleased at encounter-

ing us, but otherwise disappointed my preconceptions of what an admirer should be.

“ ‘Félicité, he will not tell of us!’ I whispered, fearfully.

“ ‘No, I think not,’ she answered in her own language (Mademoiselle d’Alvan could speak no other); and then she turned to our companion, and put the question to him jestingly. Of course he promised the profoundest secrecy; more, he declared that he must have the pleasure of accompanying us to the concert, and seeing us safe home afterwards; to which Félicité gave a gracious assent, and being close to the gardens, we pulled our hoods over our faces. Mr. Moore paid the money for us, and we entered boldly. Of course I saw afterwards that this pretended *rencontre* between the lovers was merely a pre-concerted assignation, but at the moment I was so much a child that I really thought

it was an accident. How Félicité had managed it—by what means arranged the day and time and place of meeting is best known to Heaven and the conscience of a Belgian, for I never could discover; but whether it were through the agency of an *externe*, or at mass that morning (as, remembering her manner, I afterwards suspected), the plot had been well laid and carried out, and by the time we had reached the site of the concert, she was deeply engaged in her flirtation, and as far as conversation went had left me to my own resources. I had plenty of food to occupy my mind, however, in the scene by which I now found myself surrounded, and I gazed at everything and everybody with so much interest and pleasure as almost to forget my *bête noir*—the dread of encountering the faces of Miss Little and Madame Gobeaux amongst the crowd.

“But I was no longer astonished at Félicité’s assurance of our safety in venturing there, for it would have been difficult to recognise the friend you were expecting: far more one whom you thought safe at home. In the middle of the gardens, surrounded by pens of wild animals, who seemed restless and uneasy, from the unusual glare and noise, was a raised and covered rotunda, entwined with flowering creepers, and lighted with Chinese lamps; beneath which a first-rate orchestra was discoursing most excellent music. All about this centre of attraction were disposed innumerable little tables at which were seated parties of three and four in number, smoking, talking, and laughing, or drinking beer, coffee, and lemonade, whilst waiters ran to and fro in obedience to their orders, and the cry of ‘*garçon*’ mingled incessantly with the clash of the band. Up

and down the narrow vistas caused by the division of these tables, danced strings of fantastically dressed children hand in hand, whilst the outer paths of the garden were thronged by a crowd of promenaders, so dense that they could only proceed at a foot's pace. The flashing lamps, exciting music, gay dresses, and continuous chatter, so bewildered and amused me that I never listened once to what was passing between Félicité and Mr. Moore ; and as, in consequence of our position, we only kept to the unlighted paths, I had full opportunity to stare at everything without the chance of being stared at in return.

“ After a little while, our conductor left us, but soon returned with a waiter bearing a table and chairs to be set down in the shade for our convenience, where we were quickly served with anything that fancy dictated to us. This was charming ! this

was real enjoyment ; so Félicité and I repeated to each other a dozen times, as we rested ourselves in the security of the unlighted pathway, and sipped coffee, and eat cakes. We could have lingered there all night, listening to the music, and criticising our fellow-creatures, but ten o'clock soon slipped away, and Félicité was firm in her resolution to be home by eleven.

“ ‘It is the first time,’ she said, as we unwillingly drew the hoods of our cloaks over our faces again and prepared to leave the gardens, ‘but it does not follow that it need be the last ;’ in which sentiment both Mr. Moore and myself most fervently acquiesced. In fact, so elated was I by the entire success of the proceeding that I even proposed we should make it a daily occurrence. We reached the *Rue des Capucines* without any adventure, for, as Félicité had prognosticated, all the world was at the

concert, and the streets were nearly empty. The old convent looked grim enough as we came in sight of it, for not a light was to be seen in the windows, nor a sound to be heard upon the premises.

“ ‘Safe as can be!’ said Félicité triumphantly as we all three stood before the *grille* and she fumbled in her pocket for the key. ‘We have only to creep through the lobby, *mamie*, and up the stairs, and no one will hear us; those Germans sleep like pigs—’ but there she stopped suddenly and her face changed, as she made a deeper dive into her pocket.

“ ‘Can I help you, mademoiselle?’ said Ernest Moore tenderly.

“ ‘The key!’ she ejaculated, with a look of alarm. ‘What shall we do? I have lost the key!’

“ ‘Oh! it is impossible,’ I cried, not daring to believe in such a misfortune; but

we turned her pocket inside out, and its contents belied my faith, added to which there was a large hole in the corner where the heavy piece of metal had evidently worked itself out.

“ ‘What are we to do?’ we asked simultaneously as we gazed blankly in each other’s faces.

“ Mr. Moore pulled his budding moustaches and seemed unable to assist us.

“ ‘Climb the wall,’ I suggested, looking upwards.

“ ‘Ha!’ said Félicité. ‘That would be easy; it is only twenty feet high, and smooth as a table. Think of some other clever plan, *mamie*!’

“ ‘It is not my fault,’ I answered indignantly.

“ ‘It is the fault of no one; it is our bad luck! Well! we cannot stay here at all events, for Mees and Madame will be home

presently, and sure to notice anyone standing at the *grille*. Let us move onwards.'

" 'Are you quite sure the key is gone, Félicité ?'

"At this, we instituted another search, but with the same result. Nothing was produced except a pocket-handkerchief and a few gingerbread nuts, and the hole in the corner which had done all the mischief was an undoubted fact. We were compelled to give up the key as a bad job.

" 'Would it be of any use my returning to the gardens to look for it in the place where we last sat?' suggested Mr. Moore.

"No ! Mademoiselle d'Alvan thought it would be useless ; besides the concert would probably be over by the time he got there, and the gates closed. The only chance was to rouse up some of the servants before Miss Little and Madame Gobeaux returned,

and trust to their generosity for concealing our peccadillo ; with which intent we were cautiously approaching the ponderous *portecochère* when we perceived to our horror that it was already besieged by the party we were so desirous to avoid, who had returned earlier than we had anticipated, and were vigorously ringing for admittance. All chance of entering without discovery was over then ; and according to my unsophisticated ideas, the only thing left for us was confession and promises of amendment ; but just as I expected to see Félicité rush forward to tell the whole truth to Miss Little and her partner, she pulled me violently in the opposite direction, and at the same moment the heavy *portecochère* opened and closed again ; and they had disappeared.

“ ‘Oh ! Félicité !’ I exclaimed almost crying, ‘ why did you not speak at once ?

now they have entered the house, and we shall have to ring before they will admit us.

“ ‘Ring !’ she echoed scornfully. ‘Do you think I would ring at that bell, *mamie*, and confess I’ve spent the evening at the gardens, before Graub and Netta and all the rest of them, just to be turned out as I was from the *pensionnat* at Brussels. I would die first !’

“ ‘But what shall we do then ? Where can we go ?’ I demanded in astonishment.

“ ‘We will sit by the road side, or walk about the town till the morning breaks,’ she said decidedly ; ‘it wants but four hours to daylight, and as soon as the servants are stirring at Numero 40, I will go down and speak to the old cook Fanchette, and she will make it all right for us. Come ! we had better not loiter about here,’ and im-

periously she marched off in the direction of the town.

“ I was but a foolish wilful child, yet I had wit enough to see that this measure was the most detrimental we could adopt.

“ ‘ Oh ! speak to her, Mr. Moore ! ’ I exclaimed, the shyness which I had hitherto preserved towards our companion being swallowed up in my distress at making a bad matter worse. ‘ Persuade her to do what is reasonable ; we cannot possibly pass the night in the town.’

“ He seemed to agree with me, for his face was thoughtful and perplexed.

“ ‘ Mademoiselle d’Alvan,’ he commenced entreatingly ; but Félicité would not listen to him.

“ ‘ I do not ask you to accompany me,’ she said abruptly. ‘ We want no assistance, Monsieur ; you can return to Brussels. But

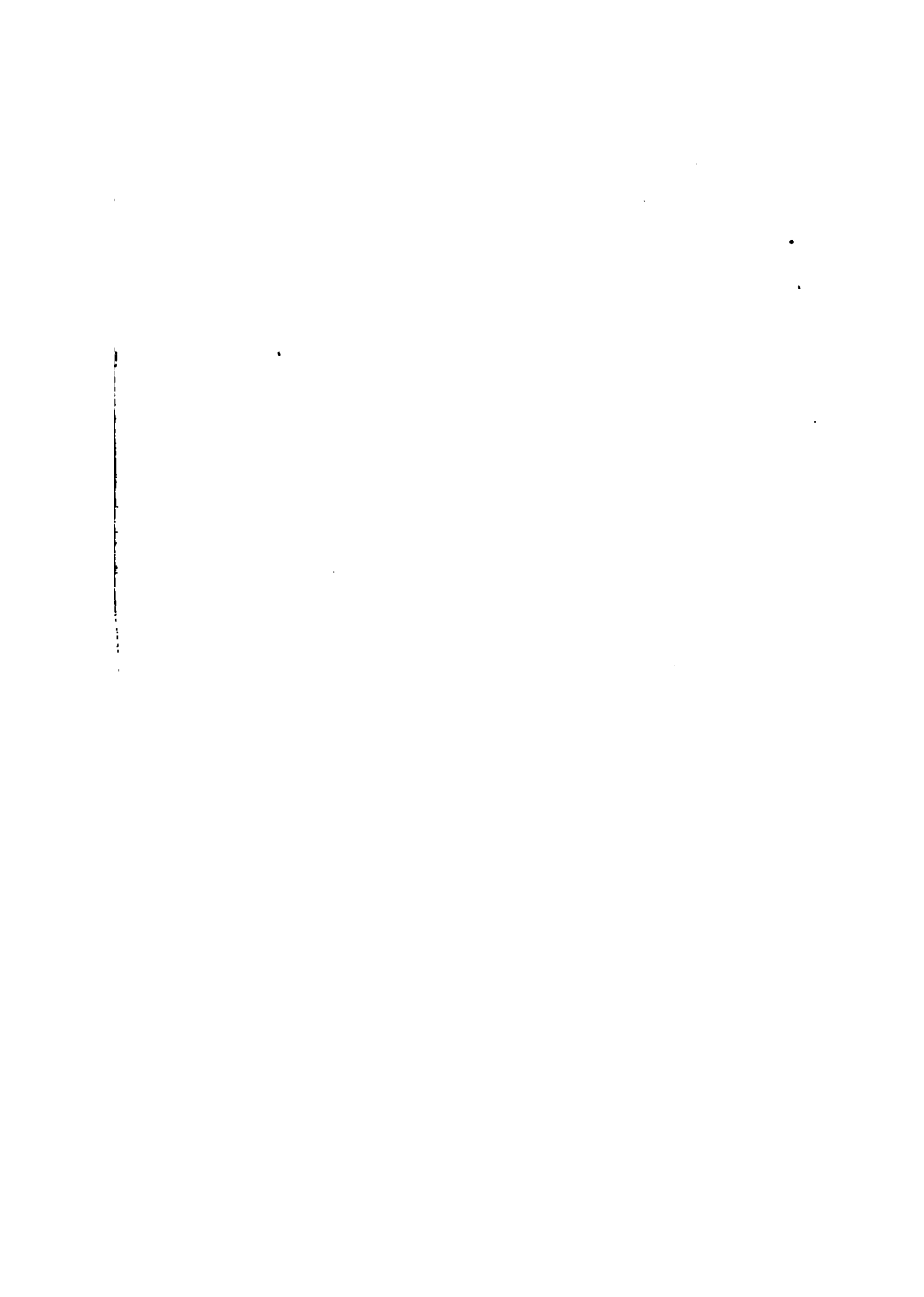
I am quite determined not to humble myself before Miss Little or Madame Gobeaux, and the only way of avoiding it is to wait until the morning.' And she continued to proceed in the same direction.

"What could I do but accompany her? To return to the *pensionnat* alone would have been to betray the secret I had promised to preserve, and whatever was in store for me, I was not capable of that. So I heaved a deep sigh, and looked at Mr. Moore, and tacitly agreeing no other course was open to us, we slowly and unwillingly followed in the footsteps of the headstrong Mademoiselle d'Alvan. The *Rue des Capucines* was situated on the outskirts of the town, and for some little while our way lay through a line of private houses, but suddenly the features of the *faubourgs* changed, the trees disappeared, the road became narrower and more confined, and in

a few minutes more we found ourselves where I had often wished to be, in the very heart of Antwerp."

END OF VOL. I.





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